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KFC, Pizza Hut operators Sapphire, Devyani merge

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SPORTS

India may tour B'desh for a 3-match ODI and T20I series

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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TMC parades 3 'dead' people at rally

KOLKATA, 2 JAN

The TMC and the BJP on Friday virtually kicked off their separate battles for the ensuing assembly elections in West Bengal, with each accusing the other of disrupting the electoral process in the state. Trinamool Congress General Secretary Abhishek Banerjee, at a rally, paraded two men and a woman, marked as dead voters in the draft electoral rolls. "These three people have been marked dead by the Election Commission in the Special Intensive Revision of the electoral rolls," Abhishek said. Meanwhile, BJP's leader of Opposition in Bengal Suvendu Adhikari too raked the SIR issue. "They (Trinamool) are opposing SIR because they will not get the votes of Rohingyas and Bangladeshi infiltrators," Suvendu said in his speech. *—PTI*

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Grok told to remove AI porn of minors

Centre sends notice to X for vulgar content

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

The government on Friday slammed the Elon Musk-led social media platform X for its 'failure' to remove all vulgar, obscene and unlawful content, especially generated by AI app Grok, and asked it to observe statutory due diligence obligations or be ready to face the music.

The Ministry of Electronics and IT (Meity), in its notice to the Chief Compliance Officer for India operations of X, directed the US-based organisation to remove all the unlawful content without any delay.

"...X is hereby directed to... remove or disable access, without delay, to all content already generated or disseminated in violation of applicable laws, in strict compliance with the timelines prescribed under the IT Rules, 2021, without vitiating the evidence in any manner," the order dated January 2 said.

Meity has also directed X to take action against offending content, users and accounts and submit a detailed action taken report (ATR) within 72 hours of the date when the order was issued.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Grok

"It is reiterated that non-compliance with the...requirements shall be viewed seriously and may result in strict legal consequences against your platform, its responsible officers and the users on the platform who violate the law, without any further notice, under the IT Act, the IT Rules, the BNSS, the BNS and other applicable laws," the order said.

- MP Priyanka Chaturvedihad sought action, saying that Grok was being used to morph images of women. Reports suggested that children could also be morphed into sexual images

The government action came in the wake of complaints from public representatives, regarding the increasing use of Grok app for obscene depiction of women and children on the social media platform. MP Priyanka Chaturvedi, in a letter to Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, earlier sought urgent intervention.

Such content "reflects a serious failure of platform-level safeguards and enforcement mechanisms, and amounts to gross misuse of artificial intelligence technologies in violation of applicable laws," a government order said. *—PTI*

Janardhan booked for Ballari clash; SP suspended

BALLARI, 2 JAN

Four FIRs were registered in connection with the violent clash that erupted over the installation of banners ahead of a Valmiki statue unveiling programme in Ballari, police said on Friday.

BJP MLA Janardhan Reddy and former minister Sriramulu were among those booked in connection with the clash on Thursday which resulted in the death of one person.

CM Siddaramaiah ordered an inquiry into the incident. Security was beefed up in Ballari, even as the situation remained peaceful on Friday.

Superintendent of Police (In-charge) Ranjit Kumar Bandaru said there was a stone pelting and an accidental firing in front of Janardhana residence in the Havambhavi area on Thursday in connection with the installation of a flex banner between the supporters of Janardhan, Sriramulu and the supporters of local MLA Bharath Reddy and his supporter Satish Reddy.

He said that the situation is currently peaceful. "We have got extra forces, ten Karnataka State Reserve Police (KSRP) and 12 District Armed Reserve (DAR) parties. Officials and forces have been called from Chitradurga, Koppal and Vijayanagara districts, and bandobast has been made."

Police fire a warning shot after a clash erupted in Ballari on Thursday outside BJP MLA Janardhan Reddy's house **PHOTO: SALAR**

Bandaru rejected charges of police failure, saying that the situation grew volatile very quickly.

The post-mortem of the deceased Rajashekhar Reddy has been conducted, and necessary arrangements has been made for his last rites, he added. Preliminary information said, the bullet that hit the victim was not from the police weapon, he said, but "from a private weapon".

BALLARI SP SUSPENDED

Ballari Superintendent of police Pavan Nejjur was suspended with immediate effect, pending inquiry, in light of the clash, a government circular said. He was transfered to Ballari from Vijayapura Lokayukta SP on 31 December. *—PTI*

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Govt launches Rs 7,295 cr package to boost export credit

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

The Indian government has unveiled a Rs 7,295-crore export support package aimed at enhancing exporters' access to credit. Announced on 2 January, the package includes a Rs 5,181-crore interest subvention scheme and Rs 2,114-crore collateral support, set to roll out over six years (2025-31). Ajay Bhadoo, Additional Secretary in the Commerce Ministry, stated that these interventions will tackle the trade finance challenges faced by exporters.

The interest subvention scheme will provide exporters with subsidies on pre- and post-shipment export credit, particularly for identified sectors, allowing MSME exporters to avail themselves of competitive rates as global trade encounters obstacles. The government will offer subsidy benefits between 2.75 per cent, with a cap of Rs 50 lakh per firm. Additionally, up to Rs 10 crore collateral will be guaranteed for export-linked working capital loans, with coverage up to 85 per cent for micro and small exporters.

Meanwhile., the government approved the third tranche of the Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS), with Rs 41,863 crore allocated to 22 projects designed to bolster India's electronics manufacturing ecosystem. Ashwini Vaishnaw, Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology, highlighted that this initiative is expected to create significant employment across several states, while promoting self-reliance in electronics supply chains.

The ECMS aims to strengthen domestic value chains and integrate Indian companies into global value chains, striving for a USD 500 billion manufacturing value by 2030-31. *—Agencies*

Zohran, 8 US lawmakers call for Umar's release

NEW YORK, 2 JAN

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani's handwritten note backing jailed activist Umar Khalid, alongside BJP claims linking Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to US lawmakers critical of India, has added a political edge to a letter from American legislators urging a fair and timely trial under international law.

The note, shared on X by Khalid's partner Banojyotsna Lahiri, quoted Mamdani recalling Khalid's words on "bitterness" and said it was a "pleasure" to meet his parents. The BJP alleged that US Representative Jan Schakowsky, among the signatories, met Rahul Gandhi in 2024, claiming a pattern of "anti-India narratives" raised abroad.

Separately, eight US lawmakers, led by Representatives Jim McGovern and Jamie Raskin, wrote to Indian Ambassador to the US Vinay Kwatra expressing concern over the "prolonged pre-trial detention" of those charged in the February 2020 Delhi riots, which left 53 people dead and over 700 injured.

- Khalid has been jailed for five years without a proper trial under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and IPC provisions for allegedly conspiring in the Delhi riots.

Khalid has been jailed for five years under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and IPC provisions for allegedly conspiring in the riots. The lawmakers said human rights groups, legal experts and media have questioned the investigation's fairness, warning the detention may breach international standards of due process and proportionality.

They noted the matter is before the Supreme Court and welcomed Khalid's bail to attend his sister's wedding, urging that he be released on bail pending trial. *—Agencies*

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Kerala UDF adds 3 more parties

KOCHI, 2 JAN

Ahead of the Assembly polls, the Congress-led UDF in Kerala decided to expand its base by adding three more parties, including the Trinamool Congress, to its fold.

The Leader of the Opposition in the Kerala Assembly, VD Satheesan, said the Trinamool Congress (Kerala), led by former MLA PV Anvar, the Janadhipathya Rashtriya Party (JRP) led by tribal leader CK Janu, and the Kerala Kamaraj Congress, led by Vishnupuram Chandrasekharan, will become UDF associates. CK Janu and Vishnupuram Chandrasekharan were earlier constituents of the NDAand but resigned. *—PTI*

Delhi lifts GRAP 3 again, saying air has improved

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) on Friday withdrew restrictions under Stage 3 of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) across the Delhi-NCR after a significant improvement in air quality.

Officials said Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) improved from 380 on Thursday to 236 by 4pm on Friday, indicating a sustained positive trend. In view of this, the CAQM sub-committee decided to revoke all curbs under GRAP Stage 3 with immediate effect. However, measures under GRAP Stages 1 and 2 will continue to remain in force across the region.

Delhi's AQI improved from 380 on Thursday to 236 on Friday **Photo: PTI**

VEHICLE restrictions imposed during Stage 3 have been lifted, allowing BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel cars back on the roads

With the rollback, non-essential construction and demolition activities can resume, along with earthwork, piling, trenching and finishing works. Operations of stone crushers, brick kilns and mining activities, as well as the transport of construction materials, have also been allowed, subject to pollution control norms.

Vehicle restrictions imposed during Stage 3 have been lifted, allowing BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel cars back on the roads. Physical classes for students up to Class five can fully resume.

The Commission clarified that project sites closed for violations will remain shut unless explicitly permitted. *—PTI*

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Officials penalised for bad MP water

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has taken decisive action regarding the contaminated drinking water issue in Indore, instructing officials to serve show-cause notices to the Municipal Corporation Commissioner and Additional Commissioner. The Additional Commissioner will be transferred immediately, and the in-charge Superintending Engineer will be relieved of their duties in the water distribution department. He emphasised that corrective measures are being implemented, with a virtual meeting scheduled with mayors and other officials. *—ANI*

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K'taka farmer assaulted in extortion attempt

MANGALURU, 2 JAN

A case has been filed following an alleged extortion attempt and physical assault on a farmer in Dakshina Kannada district. The incident occurred in Mulki on Thursday evening, according to local police.

The accused, Shyamsundar Shetty, Akshay Poojari, and Suvin, forcibly accessed the property of Shamsu Saheb in Kelaginmane. They demanded money. When Shamsu's son, Sahabuddin, challenged this demand, an altercation erupted, escalating into violence, where they beat them with an iron rod.

Eyewitnesses said that earlier in the day, the accused photographed the family's cattle shed, housing award-winning buffaloes from a local Kambala event. The group returned later in a vehicle. Locals intervened, allowing the victims to escape while the assailants fled. *—PTI*

SPARKS ROW

Buy women for Rs 25K: U'khand neta's husband

DEHRADUN, 2 JAN

A video purportedly showing Girdhari Lal Sahu, husband of Uttarakhand Women Empowerment Minister Rekha Arya, claiming that "girls can be found in Bihar for Rs 20,000 to 25,000".

The clip, recorded in Someshwar Assembly constituency in Almora district, shows Sahu taunting BJP workers over marriage, telling one young man, "Come with us, we will get you married".

The comment was made during preparations for the 2027 Assembly elections, when Sahu was addressing party workers in the Daulaghat area while assisting his wife's constituency outreach.

The comments triggered a political storm.

Uttarakhand Women Empowerment Minister Rekha Arya and her husband Girdhari Lal Sahu **PHOTO: X**

The Pradesh Mahila Congress announced protests across cities, including Haridwar, and a gherao of Minister Arya's residence in Yamuna Colony, Dehradun, prompting heavy police deployment. Mahila Congress president Jyoti Rautela called the comment "a direct insult to women of the entire country and Bihar" and demanded that Arya and her husband apologise publicly.

Rautela said such remarks "normalise social evils like human trafficking, child marriage and exploitation of women," warning of agitation from streets to the Assembly if the government shields those responsible.

As the controversy escalated, Sahu issued a video clarification, claiming his remarks were made "humorously" and were being distorted by political opponents.

- Sahu said "girls can be found in Bihar for Rs 20,000 to 25,000," while telling an audience that it is easy to get a wife. "Come with us, we will get you married." His comments triggered backlash

He said he respects women "like goddesses" and cited his role in organising marriages for underprivileged girls annually in Bareilly.

"Nevertheless, if my words have hurt or offended anyone, I apologise with folded hands," he said. *—Agencies*

PHOTO: PTI

SC named CEC visits Bannerghatta over reduction of ESZ

BENGALURU, 2 JAN

A member of the Supreme Court-appointed Central Empowered Committee on Friday visited Bannerghatta National Park in connection with a petition challenging the reduction of the Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) around the protected area.

CEC member Chandra Prakash Goyal held meetings with forest department officials to assess the potential ecological impact.

The petition filed by K Belliappa and others in May 2025, contended that the notification reducing the ESZ, excluded ecologically sensitive areas around established elephant corridors, thereby weakening wildlife protection. "My visit is primarily for compiling data before finalising and submitting a report, " Goyal said. The case will come up on 7 January. *—PTI*

Priyank flays BJP over Bangladesh player in IPL

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Minister for Electronics, IT/BT and Rural Development & Panchayat Raj Priyank Kharge on Friday criticised the BJP for its outrage over the inclusion of a Bangladesh player in the Indian Premier League (IPL). Kharge shared a post on his X account stating "BJP and their "Vichar Parivaar" are outraged over the inclusion of a Bangladeshi player in the IPL. If an overseas player is in the IPL, it is because the BCCI or the IPL rules allow him. Instead of blaming the franchise, shouldn't the BJP leaders ask why the BCCI is allowing Bangladesh players to participate in the IPL, when they should be banning it." Rahman was picked up by the Kolkata-based franchise for a whopping Rs 9.20 crore at the IPL auction.*—ANI*

Maize farmers suffering massive loss: Ashoka

BENGALURU, 2 JAN

BJP MLA and Leader of Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka alleged that maize farmers are suffering a loss of "Rs 400 to Rs 450 per quintal due to the non-opening of procurement centres". In a post on X, he flayed the Congress, saying that even a month after the State government has passed since you ordered the purchase of maize through Karnataka Milk Federation's (KMF), nothing of the sort has happened. "Are you waiting for the tweet of AICC General Secretary KC Venugopal?" he mocked. Massive protests had broken out across the State as maize prices fell, after which the Congress revised the norms.*—SALAR NEWS*

Janardhan's life in danger: BJP cries 'gunda raj'

Oppn demands investigation as tensions prevail in Ballari

BENGALURU/ BALLARI, 2 JAN

Alleging "gunda raj", following a violent clash in Ballari over the installation of a Valmiki banner which killed one, the Opposition BJP claimed that party MLA G Janardhan Reddy's life was under threat. It urged the State DGP to provide him with police protection.

Janardhan alleged a planned conspiracy against him by Congress MLA Nara Bharath Reddy and demanded a probe by a sitting judge or CBI.

A delegation of BJP leaders, led by LoP in Assembly R Ashoka and LoP in Council Chalavadi Narayaswamy, met DGP MA Saleem and submitted a petition seeking protection for Janardhan and B Sriramulu (Janardhan's close associate and former minister).

"There is a total collapse of law and order in Ballari," Ashoka told reporters later. "Bharat's associates had gathered to create a situation to finish off Janardan. This is a politically motivated matter, and Home Minister G Parameshwara instead of assuring the life and liberty of Janardan was speaking with Bharat (soon after the incident last night)".

LoP in Assembly R Ashoka with LoP in Council Chalavadi Narayanaswamy and others handed over a memorandum, in Bengaluru *PHOTO: SALAR*

Ashoka demanded a judicial probe and sought the quashing of "false cases" registered against Janardhan. The MLA had been convicted for seven in an illegal mining case.

Ashoka also sought the immediate arrest of Bharat.

Meanwhile, alleging that gunmen of Satish Reddy, a confidant of Bharath, opened fire, Sriramulu asked, "who gave them the authority to fire bullets at public places?"

"The bullets that fired prima facie appear to be 0.76 mm. It can be seen in the videos that the bullets are being fired by the gunmen of Satish Reddy, who is neither an MLA or a public representative," he said. However, accusing Janardhan of "lying" and "harbouring malice", Bharath said he wanted to assure peace to the people of Ballari district, despite the "acts of demons".

Bharath also said that he and his followers will go ahead with the Valmiki statue unveiling programme on Saturday as the goal of his opponents was to stop the event. "By going ahead with the event we will pay true tributes to the deceased Rajashekar." *—PTI*

COPS SEIZE 5 GUNS

The Karnataka police on Friday seized five guns that were allegedly used during the violence in Ballari on Thursday night. Karnataka ADGP Law and Order R Hithendra said on Friday that five guns have been seized from five private gunmen at the site. He said the police have registered a suo motu case and are conducting an internal inquiry.

> **A group gathered and came and put up banners inside the compound of Janardhan Reddy's house. They themselves fired the shots, they themselves committed the murder, and now blaming Janardhan is unforgivable. There was a pre-planned conspiracy to attack Janardhan and murder him**
>
> —R Ashoka, BJP Leader

PM's man behind EVM survey: Cong

NEW DELHI, 2 JANUARY

Congress leaders on Friday questioned the credibility of a recent survey on voter trust in Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in Karnataka, pointing out that it was carried out by an individual associated with the Prime Minister's Office.

The survey reportedly found that 84.55 per cent of respondents believe elections in India are conducted freely and fairly, while 83.61 per cent expressed trust in EVMs. Confidence in EVMs has risen from 77.9 per cent in 2023 to 83.61 per cent to when the survey was conducted.

The BJP said the survey was proof that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's "vote chori" campaign had failed.

Congress leader Supriya Shrinate questioned the impartiality of the survey, which was reportedly conducted by the NGO Grassroots Research and Advocacy Movement (GRAAM), founded by Balasubramaniam, who is linked to the Prime Minister's Office. Shrinate noted that Balasubramaniam had authored a laudatory book on the Prime Minister in 2024, raising concerns about the neutrality of the survey.

"The headline claimed that people trust the EVMs and the Election Commission, but the key details within the article were suppressed. The survey in question was carried out in May 2025, but Rahul Gandhi's expose on alleged vote rigging came only in August 2025. Given the agency's affiliations, how impartial could the survey truly be?"

IT/BT Minister Priyank Kharge echoed the charge, noting that the survey, commissioned by the Election Commission through the State Chief Electoral Officer, covered only 50 respondents per Assembly constituency, making it statistically weak and prone to wide sampling errors and selection bias.

Similarly, AICC General Secretary BK Hariprasad and KPCC Media and Communication Chairman Ramesh Babu said in a press release that the sample size was a mere 5,100 people, which does not represent the State's population. They said that the findings of the report were selectively highlighted. Points such as the influence of money power and the inducements and misuse of schemes were downplayed.

"This selective projection serves ECI image management, not electoral reform," they said. They added that the survey seemed to be aimed at pleasing the ECI.*—Salar News*

PHOTO: AI

Retired teacher duped of Rs 1.61 cr in digital arrest scam

KARWAR, 2 JAN

- The accused claimed that several ATM cards had been recovered from the possession of a terrorist held in Mumbai and that one of the cards was registered in Palden's name

Cyber fraudsters impersonating Mumbai Police officials allegedly swindled a 72-year-old retired teacher of Rs 1.61 crore through online fraud in the State.

The incident involved a resident of the Tibetan Colony in Mundgod of Uttara Kannada district, police said on Friday.

According to the complaint filed with the district police on Thursday, Palden received a WhatsApp call from an unidentified person who introduced himself as an inspector from the Colaba Police Station in Maharashtra.

The caller claimed that several ATM cards had been recovered from the possession of a terrorist arrested in Mumbai and that one of the cards was registered in Palden's name.

The fraudster threatened the elderly man by claiming that crores of rupees had been transferred from his bank accounts and that a money laundering case was registered.

The accused conducted video calls while wearing a police uniform and sent fake bank statements to the victim, a senior police officer said.

The complainant was told that to avoid arrest, his funds needed to be deposited into a so-called "National Fund" and that the money would be returned once the investigation was completed.

Realising that he was cheated, Palden complained to the Karwar Cyber Crime Police Station. *—PTI*

PSYCHIATRIST AMONG 3

B'luru radicalisation probe: three charged

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

The National Investigation Agency on Friday chargesheeted three people, including a psychiatrist, in a 2023 Bengaluru case linked to Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba, officials said.

In its second supplementary chargesheet filed before a Bengaluru court on Thursday, the NIA named Anees Fathima, Chand Pasha A and Nagaraj S under provisions of the IPC, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Explosive Substances Act, Prevention of Corruption Act and Karnataka Prisons Act.

The agency, which took over the probe from Bengaluru police in October 2023, had earlier chargesheeted nine accused, including absconder Junaid Ahmed. The case stems from a July 2023 recovery of arms, ammunition and digital devices from habitual offenders who allegedly planned terror attacks to undermine India's sovereignty and security. Investigators said the conspiracy aimed to promote LeT's interests and facilitate the escape of T Naseer, a life convict in multiple terror cases, while he was being escorted between prison and court.

NIA arrests psychiatrist, police officer in Lashkar-e-Taiba prison radicalisation case in Karnataka *PHOTO: X*

According to the NIA, Fathima, Junaid's mother, provided funds and logistics to Naseer inside Parappana Agrahara prison, handled grenades and walkie-talkies, and enabled communications. She also helped accused Salman Khan flee to Dubai; he was later extradited from Rwanda. Chand Pasha allegedly took bribes for sharing escort details, while psychiatrist Nagaraj smuggled mobile phones into jail, one reaching Naseer. Officials said investigations continue and further arrests remain possible in the case statewide. *—PTI*

UNVEILING HANDLOOM EXPO

Environmentalist Yellappa Reddy with others during the inauguration of Wood and Stone Sculpting camp at Lalbagh on Friday. (Right) Minister for Textiles Shivananda Patil with MLA K Gopalaiah and others during the opening of National Handloom Expo-2026 at Mahalakshmi Layout in Bengaluru *PHOTO: SALAR*

Khandre orders probe into pregnant leopard's death

BENGALURU, 2 JAN

Forest Minister Eshwar B Khandre ordered an inquiry into the death of a pregnant leopard in the Basavanatara forest, amid allegations that illegal stone quarrying may be the cause of death. The leopard's carcass, carrying three cubs, was found on 26 December near Kanakapura Road, Bengaluru Urban district.

The inquiry follows allegations of stone quarrying and mining activities around the Kaggalipura forest, raised by Yeswanthpur MLA, ST Somashekar. The forest area, located near human settlements, has faced increasing infrastructure development and mining in recent years. Acting on Somashekar's claims, Khandre ordered the investigation into possible forest law violations.

Khandre confirmed that an FIR has been registered in connection with the leopard's death, The probe will examine whether mining-related disturbances contributed to the death.

The incident has triggered outrage among wildlife conservationists and activists, who have repeatedly flagged the threat posed by unregulated quarrying to forest ecosystems around Bengaluru. Forest department officials said they have intensified patrolling and are collecting evidence, including mining records. *—ANI*

Yaduveer directs MCC to identify hawking zones in Mysuru

MYSURU, 2 JAN

MP Yaduveer Krishnadutta Chamarajan Wadiyar on Friday asked Mysuru City Corporation (MCC) officials to scientifically identify hawking and non-hawking zones to improve safety and cleanliness in the heritage city. Speaking at a meeting at the City Corporation Hall, he noted that earlier zoning exercises were criticised as unscientific, though MCC had identified 22 vending and 14 non-vending zones.

Officials said PM SVANidhi registrations show about 30,000 people declaring themselves street vendors in Mysuru. However, under the Karnataka Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Rules, 2019, only State residents living in Mysuru are eligible for benefits, reducing the number to around 15,000. A senior member said Mysuru has 15,000 vendors, but MCC has issued identity cards to only 1,500. While cardholders operate legally, migrant operate in localities. *—Salar News*

TECHIE AMONG ACCUSED

Two held for obscene content about actor Darshan's family

BENGALURU, 2 JAN

Two men were arrested for allegedly posting obscene and derogatory content on social media against the wife and family of Kannada actor Darshan, who is currently lodged in jail in the City in connection with a murder case, police said on Friday.

The accused were identified as Chandrashekar B, 45, an auto-rickshaw driver who is a resident of Bengaluru and Nithin, 31, a software engineer, who is a resident of Davanagere, they said.

The action was taken based on a complaint filed by the actor's wife Vijayalakshmi at the Cyber Crime police station on 24 December, they said.

In her complaint, she alleged that certain individuals were posting low-level obscene, derogatory posts, comments and sending messages targeting her and her family on social media platforms, police said. She requested appropriate legal action against more than 18 individuals who had posted defamatory content. Based on her complaint, a case was registered and an investigation was initiated, police said.

Kannada actor Darshan and family *PHOTO: INSTAGRAM*

"During the investigation, officials of the Cyber Crime Police Station found that the accused had posted obscene messages against Mrs. Vijayalakshmi and her family on social media platforms," a police officer said. *—PTI*

SIT to investigate illegal activities in Central Prison

KALABURAGI, 2 DEC

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) has been formed to probe allegations of illegal activities at the Central Prison in Kalaburagi, including gambling, consumption of alcohol and cigarettes, and other unlawful practices. The team, headed by Additional Inspector General PV Anandareddy, will be visiting the prison on 2 January to conduct inspections and question officials and staff allegedly involved.

Director General (DG) of Prisons Alok Kumar is also scheduled to visit the prison on 3 January as part of the investigation. The DG visit follows reports of gambling and viral videos showing inmates leading high-profile lifestyles inside Kalaburagi Central Prison. The investigation also addresses a bribery scandal involving RD Patil, the kingpin of the Police Sub-Inspector (PSI) recruitment scam, and Prison Superintendent Anita, after both parties traded allegations of corruption and misconduct.

- The team, headed by Additional IGP PV Anandareddy, will be visiting the prison on 2 January to conduct inspections and question officials and staff

Officials have said that the viral video is not recent, believing it to be two to three months old. This was confirmed by the fact that Munikrishna, alias Kappe—the inmate seen gambling in the viral footage—was released from prison on 2 December 2025. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Shah to hold talks with Palaniswami

SRI VIJAYA PURAM, 2 JAN

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who is scheduled to arrive here on Friday for a three-day visit to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, will chair a crucial meeting of the parliamentary consultative committee of his ministry on 3 January. This will be Shah's second visit to Sri Vijaya Puram in less than a month.

Amit Shah will head for Tamil Nadu from Andaman and Nicobar Islands on 4 January. He is expected to hold talks with AIADMK's top leadership in preparation for the assembly elections in TN amil Nadu during his two-day visit to the state beginning 4 January. Shah is likely to meet EK Palaniswami on 5 January. *—PTI*

UP BJP MLA dies while attending meeting

BAREILLY (UP), 2 JAN

BJP MLA Shyam Bihari Lal died on Friday after suffering a cardiac arrest during a meeting at the Circuit House in Bareilly, family sources said.

The Faridpur MLA was attending a review meeting of development projects chaired by Animal Husbandry Minister Dharampal Singh at the Circuit House when he suddenly fell ill at around 2.15 pm, party workers said. He was immediately rushed to a private hospital, where he was put on ventilator. However, he was declared dead at around 3 pm. He had celebrated his 60th birthday on Thursday.*—PTI*

HC grants bail to Baghel's son Chaitanya

RAIPUR, 2 JAN

The Chhattisgarh High Court on Friday granted bail to Chaitanya Baghel, son of former chief minister and senior Congress leader Bhupesh Baghel, in two cases connected to the alleged liquor scam. The HC granted him bail in a case lodged by the Enforcement Directorate and another by the Chhattisgarh Anti-Corruption Bureau/ Economic Offence Wing, ED counsel Saurabh Kumar Pande told PTI. The ED arrested Chaitanya Baghel in July in connection with its money laundering probe in the alleged scam, while the ACB/EOW placed him under arrest, while he was in jail, in September in its case linked to the corruption probe. The liquor "scam" in the state, according to the ED, was orchestrated between 2019 and 2022 when Chhattisgarh was governed by the Bhupesh Baghel-led Congress government. The alleged scam resulted in a "massive loss" to the state exchequer and filled the pockets of the beneficiaries of a liquor syndicate, it said. As per the ED, Chaitanya was at the helm of the syndicate behind the alleged liquor scam and handled nearly Rs 1,000 crore generated from the scandal. *—PTI*

Sabarimala: Kerala CM tightens grip on Adoor Prakash

THIRU'PURAM, 2 JAN

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan levied serious allegations against UDF convener and Congress MP Adoor Prakash, after the emergence of a photograph of the latter with Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi and the prime accused in the Sabarimala theft case, Unnikrishnan Potti.

Vijayan asked how Potti could reach Sonia, suggesting that the accused has close ties with Prakash. "At what stage does the name of Prakash come into this issue? His name surfaced when a photo emerged. It showed Sonia and two others from Pathanamthitta and Prakash," Vijayan said. *—ANI*

BJP warns Mamdani, says India won't allow meddling

VHP flays US lawmakers' request to envoy regarding Khalid

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

The BJP has accused New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani of "interfering" in India's internal affairs by writing a note on jailed activist Umar Khalid and asserted that India will not tolerate any such thing.

Questioning Mamdani's locus standi for commenting on India's internal matters, BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia on Friday said, "If India's sovereignty is challenged, 140-crore Indians will stand united under Prime Minister Modi's leadership."

This came after Mamdani wrote a note for Khalid, recalling his words on "bitterness" and the importance of not letting it consume one's self.

The note was posted on X by Khalid's partner Banojyotsna Lahiri. "When prisons isolate words travel. Mamdani writes to Umar Khalid," the caption accompanying the note said.

Gaurav Bhatia, Zohran Mamdani — PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

"Dear Umar, I think of your words on bitterness often, and the importance of not letting it consume one's self," the note signed by Mamdani said.

Reacting sharply, Bhatia said, "If anybody interferes in India's internal matters, the country will not tolerate it."

Khalid and some others were booked under the anti-terror law, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, (UAPA) 1967, and provisions of the IPC for allegedly being the "masterminds" of the February 2020 Delhi riots, which left 53 people dead and more than 700 injured.

Meanwhile, the Vishva Hindu Parishad slammed Zohran Mamdani for his note to jailed activist Umar Khalid, alleging that he insulted the Quran by coming out in defence of "criminals who talk about dividing India."

VHP spokesperson Vinod Bansal also flayed the US lawmakers who have written to Vinay Kwatra, the Indian Ambassador to the United States, urging that Khalid be granted bail.

He claimed that they come out in support of the "criminals" in India but "keep mum" when Hindus snd their temples are attacked in the United States. The lawmakers have also maintained total silence over atrocities against Hindus in Bangladesh, he charged. *— PTI*

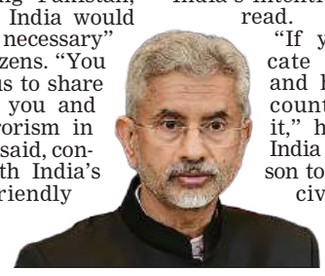
'NO WATER IF ATTACKED'

India will defend itself against bad neighbours: EAM

CHENNAI, 2 JAN

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday said India has right to defend its people against "bad neighbours" while generous with those who act responsibly, asserting that no country can seek water-sharing while continuing to spread terrorism. Speaking at IIT Madras, he said India's growth was a "lifting tide" for the region, benefiting neighbours who cooperate.

Without naming Pakistan, Jaishankar said India would "do whatever is necessary" to protect its citizens. "You cannot request us to share our water with you and also spread terrorism in our country," he said, contrasting this with India's approach to friendly neighbours.



"With good neighbours, India invests, helps and shares," he said, citing vaccine supplies during the Covid-19 pandemic, fuel and food support during the Ukraine conflict, and USD 4 billion extended to Sri Lanka during its financial crisis. Recalling vaccine diplomacy, he said he had "never seen anything having a greater emotional impact", noting how countries depended on Indian doses as richer nations stockpiled supplies. Jaishankar stressed the need for communication to prevent India's intentions being misread.

"If you communicate well, clearly and honestly other countries respect it," he said, adding India had every reason to be proud of its civilisation and democratic choice. *– Agencies*

BRS legislators walking out from the TG Assembly in Hyderabad on Friday — PHOTO: PTI

BRS boycotts Telangana Assembly session

HYDERABAD, 2 JAN

Accusing Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar of bias, the main opposition BRS on Friday said that it is boycotting the winter session of the Telangana Assembly.

Senior BRS MLA T. Harish Rao also alleged that the Congress government was running the Assembly "unilaterally" and that the BRS' voice was being "muzzled."

He said that Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar has adopted a "partial attitude," saying that BRS members should not criticise Chief Minister Revanth Reddy.

"He (Speaker) says he will not let me use the mic to talk about the Chief Minister. Then, what is the point in attending the Assembly? BRS decided to boycott the Assembly protesting against the Speaker's partiality," said Harish, the Deputy leader of the BRS in the Assembly.

Targeting Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, he alleged that the CM used "foul language" to attack the BRS in the House.

Although the BRS sought to protest against the CM's comments, it was not given an opportunity to speak, he said alleging that the Assembly was run like a "Congress office."

Referring to Revanth's remarks that it would not be wrong even if BRS president KCR and Harish Rao were "hanged" for inflicting "greater injustice" in Telangana in irrigation projects, Harish condemned CM's remarks.

"Rahul Gandhi carries the Constitution in his hand. But, democracy is being murdered in the Assembly. The main opposition is not being given the mic," he said.

Harish also alleged that Revanth had imposed "RR tax per square feet" for issuing building permissions. *— PTI*

TN Cong moving towards destruction, says party MP

CHENNAI, 2 JAN

Congress Lok Sabha MP S. Jothimani said that her party's Tamil Nadu unit is gradually moving towards the path of destruction due to the selfishness of a few leaders and said the infighting was causing huge problems.

In an expression of open dissent, she alleged the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (TNCC) is moving on a path that is directly opposite to the selfless, principled, and fearless politics of Rahul Gandhi.

"We cannot betray Rahul Gandhi," she said, in a social media post on Friday, without naming any state Congress leader.

S. Jothimani — PHOTO: ANI

TNCC President K. Selvaperunthagai declined comment, and sources close to him said the "allegations are not true."

"No political party would think of scuttling the submission of the list of polling station agents by its MP to the Election Commission when election is nearing "However, it is happening in the Congress," she said.

The Assembly election in TN amil Nadu is due in March-April. Every day, the Congress is in the news, not for people's issues but for the "wrong reasons," and the things that are happening in the Congress cause huge concern. Efforts to dilute standpoints are distressing, she said. *— PTI*

HOLY BATH

Gurukul students conduct 'Magh Snan,' a holy bath in the Hindu month of 'Magh,' in Surat on Friday. PHOTO: PTI

'Focus on those who allowed B'deshi cricketer'

LUCKNOW, 2 JAN

Amid the debate over remarks by Hindu spiritual leader Devkinandan Thakur against actor Shah Rukh Khan over the inclusion of a Bangladeshi player in the Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) team, Congress leader Supriya Shrinate questioned the role of the BCCI and the ICC in allowing Bangladeshi players to be part of the Indian Premier League (IPL) auction pool.

Reacting to the controversy, Shrinate said the focus should be on who permitted Bangladeshi players to be included in the IPL auction in the first place.

Congress MP Tariq Anwar also reacted to the comment, saying, "It is not appropriate to talk about Shah Rukh Khan in this way. He has made so many films that have a direct connection to patriotism."

He also pointed out that the inclusion of foreign players in the IPL followed approvals by the concerned authorities. *— ANI*

CONGRESS, AAP FILE PLAINTS

M'rashtra SEC to look into all unopposed election wins

NCP leader Ajit Pawar addressing the media in Mumbai on Friday — PHOTO: PTI

MUMBAI, 2 JAN

Amid allegations by opposition parties of irregularities in the filing of nominations for the civic polls, the Maharashtra State Election Commission (SEC) has sought reports from municipal corporations where candidates from ruling parties have been elected unopposed.

The SEC will check if any pressure was applied, allurement given or if any force were used against opponents to withdraw their nominations.

Five BJP and four Shiv Sena candidates in Kalyan Dombivli Municipal Corporation (KDMC) have been elected unopposed. In Pimpri Chinchwad (in Pune district), Jalgaon, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar civic bodies, at least one BJP candidate has been elected unopposed.

"Candidates from the Congress, the Janata Dal (S) and the AAP have alleged that they were prevented from filing nominations in three wards in Mumbai," he said.

Sources said that until the reports are received, the Returning Officer (RO) would not be allowed to announce the candidates elected unopposed.

The SEC has sought a report from the BMC Commissioner regarding pressure by Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar on the RO for preventing other candidates from filing nominations.

The SEC has also received a complaint against the returning officer for not allowing them to file nominations.

Narwekar, however, called the allegations "baseless" and said all candidates who were present in the Returning Officer's office before 5 pm on 30 December was allowed to file nominations. *— PTI*

- The SEC will check if any pressure was exerted, allurement given or if force was used against opponents to make them withdraw their nominations.

Chavan rejects cash-for-ticket charge

Amid widespread discontent across parties over candidate selection for the 15 January civic polls in Maharashtra, a former councillor has accused BJP leader Ashok Chavan of giving party tickets for money, a charge he has rejected.

In Nanded, Bhanusing Rawat, considered a long-time associate of Chavan, alleged that the ex-CM had accepted Rs 50 lakh to grant tickets to moneyed candidates.

"By giving tickets for money, the party has sacrificed its loyal workers," Rawat alleged, claiming that faithful BJP workers were ignored.

Rejecting the charge, Chavan said on Thursday, "I have not asked for money from anyone. I have never done anything like this."

Rawat, who has been politically active with Chavan since 1980 and is known as his staunch supporter, said he had sought a BJP ticket for his son, but the party denied it. — PTI

BJP fields 4 Muslims in Jalna city

Ahead of the 15 January civic elections in Jalna, the Mahayuti allies of the BJP, Shiv Sena and NCP, are reaching out to Muslims by fielding candidates from the community.

The BJP has fielded four Muslims. Observers attribute this shift partly to the influence of former Congress MLA Kailash Gorantyal, who recently joined the BJP and has been attempting to woo Muslims.

Although the Mahayuti partners were expected to contest together, the alliance collapsed.

Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena has fielded seven Muslims, while the NCP, headed by Ajit Pawar, has nominated 17 Muslims. — PTI

BJP withdraws candidate over old video

The BJP has withdrawn the candidature of Pooja More-Jadhav in the Pune civic polls after a backlash from party workers.

She had received her AB form (a key document for filing nomination) from the BJP for Ward Number 2 under the quota of its ally RPI.

However, her candidature ran into trouble after old videos surfaced showing her making personal remarks against Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and his wife during the Maratha quota agitation.

Union minister Murlidhar Mohol confirmed that her nomination has been withdrawn. — PTI

BJP men lock candidate to prevent him from withdrawing

Amid the scramble on the last day for the withdrawal of nominations for the 15 January civic polls, supporters of a BJP candidate locked him inside his house in Maharashtra's Nagpur to stop him from taking back his candidature on Friday.

The BJP, in its AB form, had put down Vijay Holey and Kisan Gawande as candidates from Ward 13 (D), but later

asked Gawande to withdraw. The move angered a section of BJP workers who wanted representation from the Hazaripahad area, one of the localities under Ward 13 (D). Gawande's supporters locked him inside his house so that he could not meet the RO to withdraw his nomination.

BJP MLC Parinay Fuke and local leaders reached the spot and pacified the workers, and Gawande withdrew his nomination. "Local BJP workers got upset, as they wanted me to contest," he said. — PTI

PHOTO: ANI

Pedestrian hit by TV actor's car dies in Kottayam

KOTTAYAM, 2 JAN

A lottery vendor who was seriously injured after being hit by a car allegedly driven by TV actor Siddharth Prabhu here has succumbed to his injuries, police said on Friday. The deceased has been identified as Thankaraj, 60, a native of Tamil Nadu. The accident occurred on Christmas Eve near the Nattakom Government College junction on the MC Road in Kottayam, when the car driven by Prabhu rammed and knocked down Thankaraj, who was walking along the road. He was immediately rushed to the Kottayam Medical College Hospital, where he had been undergoing treatment and later died on Thursday, police said. The actor was under the influence of alcohol at the time of the accident, and was allegedly driving at high speed. —*PTI*

'Dhunrandhar', back with tweaks; tax-free in Ladakh

LEH/JAMMU, 2 JAN

Ranveer Singh-starrer 'Dhurandhar' is now being re-released with a dialogue and some words being muted, including the terms 'Baloch' and 'intelligence', deemed offensive by some communities. Changes were made voluntarily by the filmmakers and approved under the Cinematograph Act. Also, it has been declared tax-free in the Union Territory of Ladakh by Lieutenant Governor Kavinder Gupta. The spy action film, directed by Aditya Dhar, has achieved remarkable success at the box office, surpassing Rs 1,100 crore in worldwide collections. The LG's office highlighted that the film showcases Ladakh's stunning landscapes, underscoring its aim to attract filmmakers and boost tourism. The film's sequel will be released in March. —*PTI*

27 bombs defused in Imphal East district of Manipur

IMPHAL, 2 JAN

Security forces recovered and defused 27 country-made bombs near Monglham village in Imphal East district of Manipur, police said on Friday. The explosives were found during an operation on Thursday. In a separate operation on Wednesday, forces also seized three arms and ammunition from the Langdum Nungjengbi area, a senior officer said. Search operations continue across Manipur following ethnic violence since May 2023, which has killed over 260 people and displaced thousands. —*PTI*

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

All transactions were legal, says actor Jayasurya

KOCHI, 2 JAN

Actor Jayasurya on Friday said all his financial transactions were legal after the Enforcement Directorate questioned him and his wife, Saritha, in a money-laundering probe linked to the 'Save Box' online investment scheme. The ED examined the couple under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, citing transactions involving Jayasurya as a brand ambassador. "How can we guess what people who approach us for advertisements will do in the future?" he wrote on Instagram, adding he followed rules and paid taxes. He said he appeared on 24 and 29 December, denied any 7 January summons, and affirmed a Rs 75 lakh endorsement deal, with Rs 69 lakh received via banking channels. —*PTI*

Indore water crisis claims miracle baby

Family refuses to accept compensation; residents claim 14 deaths; toll remains disputed

INDORE, 2 JAN

In the narrow lanes of Marathi Mohalla in Indore's Bhagirathpura, grief hangs heavy over the Sahu household as the family mourns six-month-old Avyan, a child born after a decade of prayers, medical treatment and vows, now the youngest face of a water contamination tragedy in India's "cleanest city".

Avyan died on 29 December after developing severe diarrhoea, allegedly triggered by contaminated drinking water. His grandmother Krishna Sahu said the infant, who weighed nearly five kilograms and was otherwise healthy, fell ill after being fed packaged milk mixed with municipal tap water due to insufficient breast milk.

"We have not taken any compensation from the state government so far. Our child is gone. Will compensation bring him back?" she asked, rejecting the Rs 2 lakh ex-gratia announced for families of the deceased.

Family members of a victim, who died after consumption of allegedly contaminated water, mourn in Bhagirathpura area of Indore, Madhya Pradesh. (Right) Exposed drinking water pipeline at Bhagirathpura *PHOTO: PTI*

Residents claim up to 14 people have died in the vomiting-diarrhoea outbreak over the past nine days, though the health department has confirmed only four deaths. Indore Mayor Pushyamitra Bhargava said he had information about 10 fatalities, adding to the conflicting figures.

Lab tests have confirmed that the outbreak, which has affected over 1,400 people, was caused by contaminated drinking water.

Chief Medical and Health Officer Dr Madhav Prasad Hasani said contamination resulted from a leakage in a main supply pipeline near a police outpost, at a spot where a toilet had been constructed.

Officials said clean water supply was restored after repairs.

Additional Chief Secretary Sanjay Dubey said a statewide SOP would be issued to prevent similar incidents. –*PTI*

'PM stays silent whenever poor die'

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday attacked the BJP's double-engine government in MP over deaths linked to contaminated drinking water in Indore, alleging Prime Minister Narendra Modi remains silent when the poor die. Citing at least 10 deaths, Gandhi said "not water, but poison was distributed" in Bhagirathpura, questioning why complaints about foul water were ignored and accountability delayed. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge echoed the criticism, saying Modi boasts about the Jal Jeevan Mission while staying silent on the tragedy in India's "cleanest city". Indore Mayor Pushyamitra Bhargava said he had information about 10 deaths, though residents claim 14. Officials confirmed contamination due to a pipeline leakage. —*PTI*

MARITAL DISPUTE LAW

Financial dominance by husband does not amount to cruelty: SC

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Financial dominance by a husband in a strained marriage does not, by itself, amount to cruelty, the Supreme Court has ruled, cautioning that criminal law cannot be used to settle personal scores. A Bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and R Mahadevan made the observation while quashing a criminal case filed by an estranged wife alleging cruelty and dowry harassment.

Setting aside a Telangana High Court order that refused to quash the FIR, Justice Nagarathna said the alleged "monetary and financial dominance" of the husband could not qualify as cruelty in the absence of tangible mental or physical harm. The court said such situations reflect social realities where men often control household finances, but stressed that criminal litigation cannot become a "gateway or tool to pursue personal vendettas".

The Bench also declined to treat the husband's demand for details of expenses from money he had sent as cruelty, calling the dispute a matter of "daily wear and tear of marriage". It held that such conduct does not attract Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code.

After examining earlier judicial precedents, the court found that none of the offences alleged against the husband were made out. It said allegations of cruelty, mental harassment and voluntarily causing hurt appeared mala fide, vague and general.

The ruling came on the husband's appeal against an 27 April, 2023 High Court order. The Supreme Court clarified that its observations will not affect pending matrimonial or other proceedings between the parties, which must be decided separately. —*PTI*

Sabarimala case: SIT under pressure of govt, says LoP

KOCHI, 2 JAN

Leader of the Opposition in the Kerala Assembly, VD Satheesan, on Friday accused the State government of interfering in the probe into the Sabarimala gold loss case by trying to induct two police officers close to the CPI(M) into the SIT.

Addressing reporters, Satheesan dismissed CM Pinarayi Vijayan's claim that there was no interference, alleging that the SIT was under intense pressure to shield CPI(M) leaders. He said three party leaders were already in jail and more could be arrested.

Satheesan rejected the CM's remarks about the prime accused being photographed with Sonia Gandhi, calling it an attempt to divert attention. He said the probe, ordered by the High Court, concerns a series of thefts at the Sabarimala temple since 2019 under the CPI(M)-led LDF government. He also alleged horse trading by the CPI(M) in the panchayat election, claiming a UDF rebel was offered Rs 50 lakh, with a voice clip of the offer going viral. —*PTI*

Cold wave in Delhi likely till 5 Jan, J'khand on yellow alert

People wrap themselves in warm clothes to keep warm on a cold winter morning outside AIIMS, in New Delhi *PHOTO: PTI*

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Cold dense fog gripped Delhi and parts of Jharkhand on Friday, disrupting visibility as temperatures dipped and air quality remained poor. The IMD said Delhi recorded a minimum of 9.1°C at Safdarjung, with similar readings elsewhere, and warned of cold wave conditions at isolated places between 2 and 5 January. Dense to dense fog is likely at night and mornings, while the maximum may hover near 18°C. Delhi's AQI stood at 302, 'poor'.

In Jharkhand, the IMD issued a yellow alert for dense fog in 11 districts from 3 to 5 January and forecast a fall in minimum temperatures by up to three degrees Celsius.

Gumla was coldest at 6.4°C. Officials warned fog may affect flights operations, highways and trains services. —*PTI*

UP: Truck driver burnt alive in crash amid fog

A truck driver was burnt alive after two vehicles collided amid dense fog on the Agra–Etawah–Kanpur six-lane highway in Uttar Pradesh, police said on Friday. The accident occurred late Thursday night near the Pakka Bagh overbridge on National Highway-2. A gypsum-laden truck travelling from Ahlanabad in Haryana to Varanasi rammed into another truck after it suddenly braked due to poor visibility. The collision triggered a fire that spread rapidly to the cabin, trapping the driver inside. Three fire tenders took an hour to douse the blaze, gutting the cabin and disrupting traffic. The deceased was identified as Jaskirat Singh alias Lovely of Sirsa, Haryana. His remains were sent for post-mortem. —*PTI*

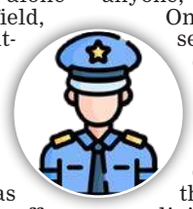
Chh'garh mine stir: Video shows lady cop's clothes being torn

RAIGARH, 2 JAN

A disturbing video showing an on-duty woman constable being assaulted and having her clothes torn during an anti-mining protest in Chhattisgarh's Raigarh district has surfaced on social media, triggering outrage.

Two men have been arrested in connection with the incident, and the police are to identify others involved in the crime, police said on Friday.

The incident took place on 27 December in Tamnar block when a protest by residents of 14 villages against a coal mining project turned violent.



Police said that a woman constable was left alone among the mob in a field, where she was assaulted.

In the video that surfaced on social media on Thursday, the constable is seen lying on the ground, crying and pleading for mercy as two men rip her clothes off and question her presence at the protest site.

She is heard crying continuously with folded hands and repeatedly requesting them to let her go.

"Don't tear, bhai. I will not do anything. I did not hit anyone," she says.

One of the accused is seen pulling her torn clothes, while another films the assault. Two of the alleged molesters, both locals, were arrested and, based on their statements and digital evidence, more people involved in the incident are being identified, Bilaspur Range IGP Sanjeev Shukla said. —*PTI*

66 flights cancelled in Delhi; 2 Hyd-bound IndiGo flights diverted

NEW DELHI/ VIJAYAWADA, 2 JAN

Severe fog disrupted flight operations across major airports on Friday, with flight cancellations in Delhi and diversions in southern India. At Delhi airport, 66 flights were cancelled due to low visibility, including 32 arrivals and 34 departures, airline sources said.

The DGCA has declared 10 December to 10 February as the winter fog window, mandating airlines to roster low-visibility trained pilots and deploy CAT-IIIB-compliant aircraft. Category III systems allow landings in poor visibility, with CAT III-A supporting runway visual range of 200 metres and CAT III-B under 50 metres.

Meanwhile, two IndiGo flights bound for Hyderabad from Delhi and Mumbai were diverted to Gannavaram airport near Vijayawada due to heavy fog. "Due to bad weather conditions in Hyderabad, the flights were diverted to Gannavaram as they could not wait mid-air," Vijayawada Airport Director Lakshmikanth Reddy said. Each aircraft, carrying nearly 200 passengers, landed safely and was scheduled to proceed to Hyderabad after clearances later in the day. —*PTI*

A team of workers and others after completing the final breakthrough of bullet train project in Maharashtra *PHOTO:X/ ASHWINI VAISHNAW*

VAISHNAW VIRTUALLY ATTENDS BULLET TRAIN TUNNEL'S FINAL BREAKTHROUGH

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Friday virtually witnessed the final breakthrough of a 1.5km mountain tunnel of the Mumbai–Ahmedabad bullet train project in Maharashtra's Palghar district from Rail Bhawan in New Delhi.

A Railway Ministry statement said the tunnel, located between the Virar and Boisar high-speed rail stations, is among the longest mountain tunnels in the district. It marks the second tunnel breakthrough in Maharashtra, following the completion of a 5km underground tunnel between Thane and the Bandra Kurla Complex in September 2025.

The 508km Mumbai–Ahmedabad High Speed Rail corridor will operate trains at up to 320kmph, cutting travel time to about two hours and 17 minutes.

The project is being implemented with the technical and financial assistance of Japanese expertise. —*PTI*

DEFAMATION PLEA

No interim relief for former TTD chief in Tirupati laddu case

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

The controversy stems from CM Naidu's claim that animal fat was used in making laddus during YS Jagan Mohan Reddy-led regime *PHOTO:ANI*

The Delhi High Court has refused to grant interim relief to former Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams chairman YV Subba Reddy in a case concerning alleged defamatory publications over the adulteration of Tirupati laddu prasadam.

Reddy, who headed the TTD board of management from June 2019 to August 2023, sought a temporary restraining order against organisations, publishers and writers who carried reports accusing him of wrongdoing in the procurement of ghee for the Tirumala temple.

In his plea, Reddy said "defamatory statements" were made alleging irregularities in ghee procurement for Lord Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple, one of Hinduism's holiest shrines.

Justice Amit Bansal said ex parte ad interim injunctions could be granted only in exceptional circumstances. "The court is not inclined to grant an ex parte ad interim injunction against the defendants qua the impugned publications," he said, adding that it was reasonable to first allow the defendants to present their defence.

The court held it was premature to consider interim relief without hearing the other side. However, Justice Bansal cautioned that any fresh publications following the order would remain open to judicial scrutiny and could attract legal consequences depending on their content. The matter has been listed for further hearing on 29 January.

The controversy stems from Andhra Pradesh CM N Chandrababu Naidu's claim that animal fat was used in making laddus during the previous YS Jagan Mohan Reddy-led regime. The YSR Congress Party rejected the claim, while the Telugu Desam Party cited a report. —*PTI*

48 in Sambhal get notices over cemetery land encroachment

SAMBHAL, 2 JAN

The district administration has issued notices to 48 people for allegedly encroaching on cemetery land near a disputed religious site, officials said on Friday.

The move followed a land measurement exercise carried out on 30 December under heavy security in the Shahi Jama Masjid–Shri Harihar Mandir area of Kot Purvi, after complaints of illegal construction of houses and shops on the land.

Tehsildar Dhirendra Pratap Singh said all identified unauthorised occupants were served notices and given 15 days to submit their responses. The replies will be examined legally, and action will be taken to remove the encroachments if the explanations are found unsatisfactory.

Officials said the alleged encroachment involves about 4,780 square meters of land under plot number 32/2, adjoining the disputed site. While earlier reports mentioned 22 structures, several families were found, resulting in separate notices. —*PTI*

KOCHI-MUZIRIS BIENNALE

Visitors look at artist Dhiraj Rabha's work at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, at Fort Kochi, in Kerala. Rabha's exhibition 'The Quiet Weight of Shadows' explores the history of insurgency in Assam under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. Around 1.6 lakh people visited the arts festival from 12 to 31 December. The Biennale will conclude on 31 March ***PHOTO: PTI***

Here's why Gen Z may stay quiet in India

Gen Z is a generation of convenience," said Harshita V, referring to her cohort's political activism, as she sipped her strawberry-flavored kombucha.

When India's Supreme Court ordered the removal of stray dogs from the streets of New Delhi in August, she said, one of her friends organised a protest. Scores signed up online. But when the protest took place the next day, only four or five people showed up.

"They rally online," Harshita said. "But, when it comes to finishing something they have started, the enthusiasm fizzles out." This anecdote set the tone for the conversation on Gen Z youths in India and their politics on a cold afternoon in late December among a small group of young people in New Delhi.

A melting pot of political opinions

India has the world's largest youth population. About 377 million Indians — some 27 per cent of the population — belong to Generation Z, a term referring to people born roughly between 1997 and 2012. It's a demographic that will play a decisive role in shaping the country's democratic future.

In a curated, townhouse-style discussion, DW spoke with young Indians to understand how they view politics. The participants were recruited through personal networks and professional circles in Delhi, with the aim of assembling differing political voices.

The group, aged 23-24, comprised Saurabh, a soft-spoken educator and civil services aspirant who ardently follows politics; Advik*, a suave finance professional; Yashaswini, a political science student preparing for the civil services with sharply articulated views; Yasir, a law student who speaks carefully about politics; and Harshita, who works in social media marketing.

Yasir identified as left-leaning, Yashaswini called herself a right-liberal, Saurabh, a centrist and Harshita is apolitical. Advik, on the other hand, wants to leave the country "in an act of political disengagement." "India is turning into a surveillance state," he said, as the light of a CCTV blinked overhead.

'Existing in a local bubble'

The discussion began by gauging their interest in politics. "Reading political news drives my anxiety. I choose to tune out and exist in a local bubble," Advik said. Harshita was more nihilistic. She believes expecting political change is "delusional".

Social media was the common source of political news for all of them. Yashaswini also consulted the government's Press Information Bureau, as well as newspapers. Underlying these choices was a shared mistrust of Indian mainstream media.

Social media aversion

For a generation that grew up with access to social media, the group was watchful of what they say online. They all agreed that they willfully refrain from posting political content on social media.

Advik said said much political content online functioned as propaganda. "I don't think the Gen Zs are engaging critically," he said. "They are constantly watching brain-rot stuff, and then they fall for the 'if not (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi, then who' narrative."

The youths said they avoided online confrontations. Any post or comment online, they said, is quick to be branded "leftist," "anti-national," "bhakt," a term used for supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Yasir said that, as a Muslim, the struggle is even more stark. He said he has to watch out for everything he says online, after an incident where right-wing groups published private information online, including his parents' address, an act known as doxing.

Do Indian politics reflect Gen Z priorities?

When asked if Indian politics reflect issues that affect young people the most, there was an emphatic and unanimous "no" from the group.

In a country where the average age of a member of parliament is the mid-50s, he argued that older politicians rely on populist measures, while young people are more concerned about employment, education and long-term economic security.

Caste and identity politics remain central to Indian elections. Yashaswini said caste continued to shape politics largely because of reservation policies.

11 years of BJP rule

Most of India's Gen Z has come of age under Modi's BJP, which has been in power since 2014. "Before the Modi government came into power, India was seen as a soft power, but now things have definitely changed for the better," Yashaswini said. She credited the government with promoting self-reliance and expanding digital payments.

Is Gen Z politically tame?

Though India's political environment has grown hypervisible over the past decade, the country's Gen Z youths seem muted compared with elsewhere in South Asia, where their counterparts in Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh have brought down governments.

The group rejected the idea that this reflects apathy.

So what's stopping young people in India from mobilising to demand better governance? Yasir said one possibility was the sense of confusion with vast amounts of information online with little verification. Saurabh said the ideological polarisation was exhausting. "We are fighting over leaders who don't care about us," he said.

Yashaswini said, "We are also exhausted that things don't change."

Yasir said regional, religious and caste divisions prevented nationwide youth mobilisation. "There is division over region, religion, caste etc, and that works in favour of the state... I don't think Indians will ever have one single thread to hold on to eventually overthrow a government."

Does India deserve a better opposition?

India's lack of a centralised figure in the opposition who can take on Modi was also a topic of discussion.

Saurabh said Gandhi's Congress party had missed opportunities to capitalise on public anger, from the Covid pandemic to protests over reported irregularities in entry exams for government jobs. *— THE DW*

SALAR سالار بنگلور

After a year of setbacks, Cong hopes for revival

The Congress endured another gloomy year in 2025, as it posted one of its worst performances in Bihar and Delhi assembly polls, and battled internal factionalism in Karnataka, one of the only three states the party rules on its own.

Promising results in the Kerala local body polls offered a flicker of hope for the grand old party that looks for a revival in 2026.

Top Congress leaders, including organisation general secretary K C Venugopal, described the Kerala local body poll results as a sign of things to come in this year's state elections, where the Congress-led United Democratic Front will face off against the incumbent Left Democratic Front for power.

The Congress is equally banking on Assam to reverse its electoral fortunes, although it remains acutely conscious of the formidable opponent in Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma of the BJP.

Elections apart, the principal opposition party continued to struggle on the organisational front, with seniors openly demanding strengthening the organisation at the grassroots. The demands cropped up towards the fag end of 2025, with a large section of the party convinced that frontal bodies have to step up for the parent organisation to revive.

Party veteran Digvijaya Singh led the demand for organisational revamp, hailing the model of the ruling BJP's mothership RSS as a disciplined cadre force. Congress outlier Shashi Tharoor backed Digvijaya Singh. Going forward, the Congress will draw solace from its recent success in local body elections in Kerala, which gave a ray of hope to the party that has been out of power in the state for close to a decade.

The road to power in Kerala is likely to be rough, given the party has multiple chief ministerial hopefuls in the race, with Venugopal, a well-known Rahul Gandhi favourite, as the frontrunner. Insiders say the party's ability to manage competing ambitions will matter in Kerala.

The factional wars in the Congress continued in other states also, with the battle between Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah and his deputy DK Shivakumar surfacing routinely through November as the party completed its half-term in the state.

Shivakumar's supporters have been awaiting a turn of power in the state, citing a promise that the chief minister's post would be rotated after half a term. Congress leaders have publicly rejected apprehensions of tension in Karnataka, but observers say the trouble could be real.

As the party negotiated tough terrains on multiple fronts in 2025, it moved into a permanent home -- Indira Bhavan -- in central Delhi. The official inauguration of the plush headquarters took place on January 15, 2025, marking an end to the Congress' 50-year stay at the iconic 24, Akbar Road, bungalow.

The shift to a new abode was quickly followed by a major electoral drubbing for the Congress in Delhi, as it failed to win a single seat in the assembly for a second time in a row. The BJP trounced the AAP in the polls and returned to power in the city after 27 years.

Later in the year, the party suffered yet another face loss, this time in Bihar.

The Congress posted its second-worst performance in electoral history, managing to win only six of the over 50 seats it contested in the state and losing deposits in most seats as its "vote chori" pitch failed to make any impact on the ground.

The party could manage to just finish ahead of Asaduddin Owaisi's AIMIM and Jitan Ram Manjhi's Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM), each of which bagged five seats.

In the bypolls held on various seats during the year, it was a mixed bag for the Congress. However, its loss in Punjab's Tarn Taran assembly bypoll to the ruling AAP has raised questions about the party's chances to come back to power in the state in 2027.

The year 2025 ended with voices within the party growing on the weak organisational set-up and calls for strengthening it. Senior leader Digvijaya Singh created a row after he lauded the strength of the RSS-BJP organisation and called for strengthening the Congress at the grassroots.

While the Congress tried to set the political narratives for most part of the year with its continued attack on the BJP over the "change of Constitution" barb, its aggressive approach on the "vote chori" charge against the ruling dispensation and the Election Commission did not translate into votes as it had expected in Bihar.

Rahul Gandhi's 'Voter Adhikar Yatra', a consistent anti-Election Commission and anti-SIR narrative, and his appeals to 'Gen Z' to "restore democracy" had no takers in the politically sensitive state.

While the election results of 2025 acted as a dampener for the party cadres, the victory in local body elections in Kerala is giving the party a ray of hope in the southern state.

In 2026, it faces an emboldened BJP in a direct fight in Assam, a formidable rival in the CPI-M in Kerala, and Mamata Banerjee's TMC, which has been ruling West Bengal for the past 15 years. In Tamil Nadu, the Congress goes to the polls with its partner DMK, which faces anti-incumbency. *—PTI*

Congress leaders described the Kerala local body poll results as a sign of things to come ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Indore residents don't trust water supply after contamination

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav speaks to a resident at a hospital in Indore ***PHOTO: PTI***

- Gabbar Lashkari, a resident of Bhagirathpura in Madhya Pradesh's Indore, narrated the troubles his family has faced amid the water contamination crisis that has claimed several lives, saying that people in the area have lost trust in water provided by the municipal corporation and are now forced to buy drinking water.

Gabbar Lashkari, a resident of Bhagirathpura in Madhya Pradesh's Indore, narrated the troubles his family has faced amid the water contamination crisis that has claimed several lives, saying that people in the area have lost trust in water provided by the municipal corporation and are now forced to buy drinking water. The chaos over the contaminated water crisis in Indore's Bhagirathpura has claimed at least four lives and left several ill. Another resident, Durgadas Maurya, however, said that the municipal corporation supplies drinking water through tankers in the morning, while water for other uses is provided from a government borewell. "This water is clean," he said.

Meanwhile, in an emotional attempt to save their mother-in-law, a daughter and a daughter-in-law confronted local councillor Kamal Waghela and later ran after Minister Kailash Vijayvargiya's car, but the minister's convoy did not stop.

Pinky Yadav said, "My mother, Ramlali Yadav, is admitted to the hospital. Her condition is serious. No one is listening to us."

Daughter-in-law Nidhi Yadav said, "Everyone in our house has fallen ill due to dirty water. The government is giving Rs 2 lakh, but that will not bring our mother-in-law back."

Speaking to ANI, local councillor Kamal Waghela said, "From the day people started falling ill, we have been supplying Narmada water through tankers every morning. People were scared, so we arranged water from another tank and distributed it. It will take time for people's trust to return. When I won the election three years ago, I had demanded that the drainage and Narmada pipeline infrastructure be changed.

Here, the drainage line is above, and the Narmada water pipeline is below. As a result, the Narmada pipeline has corroded."

"The responsibility of the Narmada water lies with municipal officer Sanjeev Shrivastava. Even though the tender for the new pipeline had been completed, he had stopped work for six months. Officers do not work quickly. It has been six days, but the reason behind the mixing of drainage and Narmada water has still not been found," he added.

Earlier, Indore Collector Shivam Verma said the initial report suggests water contamination, while authorities continue to assess the situation on the ground.

"The initial report indicates that the water is contaminated, but we are gathering more information," Verma said.

He added that the situation is being closely monitored.

"Currently, a total of 201 patients are admitted, combining both private and government facilities, and a total of 71 people have been discharged. The number of patients has decreased, but we are keeping an eye on the situation, and whoever is found infected is being treated," he said.

Verma further stated that the state government has assured full support to the affected families.

"As per the Chief Minister's instructions, free treatment will be provided to the victims, and if they have deposited any money, it will be refunded," he added.

Anil Likhar, brother of a deceased labourer, recounted that his sibling fell ill shortly after returning home from work and kept vomiting.

"On Sunday, (Arvind Likhar) returned to the house from work. He kept vomiting. On Wednesday, I went to my shop in the evening. I got a call that he is not well. We took him to the hospital. The doctor said that he had lost his life on the way," he shared. *—ANI*

2 people of Indian-origin to join Singapore parl

SINGAPORE, 1 JAN

Two Indian-origin personalities in Singapore, recognised for their contributions to work, community and society, are set to be nominated as Nominated Members of Parliament (NMPs) next week, media reports said on Friday. Dr Haresh Singaraju, family physician at National University Polyclinics, and Sanjeev Kumar Tiwari, general secretary of the Amalgamated Union of Public Employees, are among nine proposed NMPs announced by President Tharman Shanmugaratnam, with oaths to be taken later this month. The list, released by the Office of the Clerk of Parliament, also includes Mark Lee Kean Phi, returning for a second term. Leader of the House Indranee Rajah said their expertise would enrich discussions. *—PTI*

Boeing to join Bangladesh fleet after Airbus rivalry

DHAKA, 2 JAN

Bangladesh has decided in principle to procure 14 aircraft from US multinational Boeing, opting out of its rival European conglomerate Airbus after a protracted competition that also saw extensive diplomatic engagement by the countries concerned. State-run BSS news agency reported that Biman Bangladesh Airlines decided to procure the Boeing aircraft at its annual general meeting as part of its fleet expansion plan. "The approved order comprises eight Boeing 787-10 Dreamliners, two Boeing 787-9 Dreamliners and four Boeing 737-8 Max aircraft," the report said, adding, however, that the deal would be finalised following further price negotiations and after meeting other terms set by Biman's techno-finance committee. *—PTI*

Locked and loaded: Trump warns Iran over protests

Iranian official says US should take care of its soldiers

DUBAI/ WASHINGTON, 2 JAN

At least seven people were killed in massive protest in Iran against the falling Riyal *PHOTOS: SCREENGRAB*

US President Donald Trump threatened Iran as widening economic protests swept across parts of the Islamic Republic.

Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform, warning Iran that if it "violently kills peaceful protesters," the US "will come to their rescue."

"We are locked and loaded and ready to go," Trump wrote, without elaborating.

At least seven people have been killed so far in violence surrounding the demonstrations, sparked in part by the collapse of Iran's rial currency.

Shortly after, Ali Larijani, a former parliament speaker who serves as the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, alleged without evidence on X that Israel and the US were stoking the demonstrations.

"Trump should know that intervention by the US in the domestic problem corresponds to chaos in the entire region and the destruction of the US interests," Larijani wrote on X, which the Iranian government blocks. "The people of the US should know that Trump began the adventurism. They should take care of their own soldiers."

Larijani's remarks likely referenced America's wide military footprint in the region.

Ali Shamkhani, an adviser to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei who previously was the council's secretary for years, warned that "any interventionist hand that gets too close to the security of Iran will be cut."

"The people of Iran properly know the experience of being rescued by Americans: from Iraq and Afghanistan to Gaza," he added on X.

The current protests, now in their sixth day, have become the biggest in Iran since 2022, when the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in police custody triggered nationwide demonstrations. Amini was detained for not wearing her hijab.

Iran's riyal has rapidly depreciated, with USD 1 now costing some 1.4 million, which has caused prices to skyrocket. *—PTI*

Saudi warplanes bomb a camp of UAE-backed seperatists in Yemen, reportedly killing at least 7 *PHOTO: X @CLASHREPORT*

Saudi bombs UAE seperatists in Yemen

ADEN, 2 JAN

Saudi warplanes have reportedly struck on Friday forces in southern Yemen backed by the United Arab Emirates, a separatist leader said. Al Jazeera reported that seven people were killed in the strike on Hamdrmout and 20 others were injured, but there was no official confirmation of the death toll.

This comes as a Saudi-led operation attempts to take over camps of the Southern Transitional Council (STC) in the governorate of Haramout that borders Saudi Arabia.

The STC deputy and former Hamdrmout governor, Ahmed bin Breik, said that the Saudi-backed National Shield Forces advanced toward the camps, but the separatists refused to withdraw, apparently leading to the airstrikes.

Salem al-Khanbashi, the Governor of Hadramout who was chosen Friday by Yemen's internationally recognised government to command the Saudi-led forces, called the operation "peaceful."

Tensions between Saudi Arabia and the UAE rose after the STC moved last month into Yemen's governorates of Hadramout and Mahra and seized an oil-rich region. The move pushed out forces affiliated with the National Shield Forces, a group aligned with the coalition in fighting the Iran-backed Houthis. Saudi recently attacked ports in Yemen, and directly linked the UAE to the STC. *—PTI*

Mamdani revokes pro-Israel orders, kicks off housing plan

Mayor Zohran Mamdani reacts after taking the oath of office during his inauguration on the steps of City Hall *PHOTO: PTI*

NEW YORK, 2 JAN

After being sworn-in as the 112th Mayor of New York City, Indian-origin politician Zohran Mamdani vowed to govern "expansively and audaciously" as he revoked all executive orders issued by his predecessor Eric Adams after 26 September 2024, and announced executive orders aimed at solving New York City's housing crisis.

The orders revoked include a directive last month that prohibited mayoral appointees and staff "from boycotting and disinvesting from Israel and protecting New Yorkers' rights to free exercise of religion without harassment at houses of worship".

He also revoked two executive orders; one that banned agencies from taking part in the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel and another adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

Mamdani announced three executive orders inside a rent-stabilised building in Brooklyn, including the creation of two new city task forces on housing policy: one to take inventory of city-owned land that could be used for housing, and another to identify ways to spur development.

Mamdani was administered the oath of office by Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont at a ceremonial inauguration outside City Hall on Thursday, the seat of the city's government, on New Year's Day.

City Hall will "deliver an agenda of safety, affordability, and abundance, where government looks and lives like the people it represents.... and refuses to cower before challenges that others have deemed too complicated," he said. Mamdani, the son of Indian filmmaker Mira Nair and Ugandan-origin professor Mahmood Mamdani, thanked his family from "Kampala to Dilli". *—Agencies*

PHOTO: PTI

'FLARES ON CHAMPAGNE BOTTLES CAUSED SWISS FIRE'

SEOUL, 2 JAN

Swiss investigators said on Friday that they believe sparkling flares atop Champagne bottles ignited the fatal fire at a ski resort when they came too close to a crowded bar's ceiling.

Forty people were killed and another 119 injured in the blaze as it ripped through the busy Le Constellation bar at the ski resort of Crans-Montana while revellers were celebrating New Year's Eve, authorities said.

Many of the wounded were in their teens to mid-20s, police said.

"We have numerous accounts of heroic actions of very strong solidarity in the moment," Valais regional government head Mathias Reynard said. He lauded the work of emergency officials on the day after the fire but added "in the first minutes it was citizens — and in large part young people — who saved lives with their courage."

The severity of the burns has made it very difficult to identify bodies, bringing fresh agony for families who now must hand over DNA samples to authorities. In some cases, wallets and any ID documents inside turned to ash in the flames. *—PTI*

'Men in Black' actor's daughter found dead

SAN FRANCISCO, 2 JAN

Victoria Jones, daughter of 'Men In Black' actor Tommy Lee Jones, has been found dead at the age of 34 in a hotel room. The discovery was made at the Fairmont San Francisco early Thursday morning, with authorities still investigating the cause of death. Victoria made her acting debut in 'Men In Black 2' in 2002 and starred in her father's 2005 directorial project, 'The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada.' She also appeared in an episode of the series 'One Tree Hill' in 2003. Tommy has been married three times, with Victoria the child of his second wife. *—Agencies*

US tells China to halt military pressure on Taiwan

TAIPEI, 2 JANUARY

After China held massive military drills near Taiwan, the US urged Beijing to reduce its pressure tactics against Taipei.

"China's military actions and statements toward Taiwan and other regional actors unnecessarily raise tensions," US State Department's Principal Deputy Spokesperson Tommy Pigott said on Thursday.

The US intervention came in the wake of China's two-day military exercise, called "Justice Mission-2025", which concluded on 31 December. The live-fire military exercise involved extensive naval and air deployments, widely seen as a show of force aimed at pressuring the self-governed island.

"We call on Beijing to show restraint, halt its military intimidation of Taiwan, and pursue meaningful dialogue instead," Pigott stated. "The US remains committed to peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and rejects any unilateral attempt to alter the status quo, including through force or coercion".

XI INVITES S KOREAN PREZ

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday invited South Korean President Lee Jae Myung to a state visit in Beijing on Monday. Reports indicate that China is attempting to consolidate its regional presence amid widespread instability. *—ANI*

Maduro open to talking to US, but mum on CIA strike

CARACAS, 2 JAN

Venezuela is open to negotiating an agreement with the US to combat drug trafficking, the South American country's President Nicolás Maduro said in an interview aired on Thursday on state television. However, Maduro declined to comment on a CIA-led strike last week at a Venezuelan docking area that the Trump administration said was used by cartels.

Maduro reiterated that the US wants to force a government change and gain access to its oil reserves.

"The US government knows, because we've told many of their spokespeople, that if they want to discuss an agreement to combat drug trafficking, we're ready. If they want oil, Venezuela is ready for US investment," he said. Chevron Corp is the only major oil firm exporting Venezuelan crude to the US. Venezuela has world's largest proven oil reserves. *—PTI*

Shaadi not enough for Green Card

Marrying a US citizen may not be enough to make an individual eligible for a Green Card, said immigration attorney Brad Bernstein of Spar & Bernstein. Bernstein said said that the Trump administration now want to ensure that the couple lives together.

I like thin blood: Trump on Aspirin

Trump told Wall Street Journal he takes more aspirin than his doctors recommend but asserts his health is perfect. Trump said this causes him to bruise, but he didn't want to change his 25-year practice. "I don't want thick blood pouring through my heart. I want nice, thin blood."

Kim Ju Ae, her mother Ri Sol Juand North Korean leader Kim Jong Un visit Kumsusan Palace of the Sun in Pyongyang, North Korea, *PHOTO: KCNA*

Kim's daughter & likely heir visits family mausoleum

SEOUL, 2 JAN

The teenage daughter of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un made her first visit to a sacred family mausoleum, a step that experts say bolstered her status as her father's potential heir.

The visit on Thursday sparked speculation that the girl, reportedly named Kim Ju Ae and aged about 13, could be named a high-level official at the next ruling Workers' Party congress.

Images carried by North Korea's state media on Friday showed Kim Ju Ae standing in the front row with her parents and bowing at Pyongyang's Kumsusan Palace of the Sun in Pyongyang, where the embalmed bodies of her late grandfather and great-grandfather are on display.

The palace is "a place that symbolises the legitimacy of the North Korean regime" and her visit there ahead of the Workers' Party congress is a political move, said Cheong Seong-Chang, deputy head of the Sejong Institute in South Korea.

Kim Jong Un, 41, is the third generation of his family to rule North Korea since the country's formation in 1948. He often marks key anniversaries by visiting the Kumsusan palace. *—PTI*

Pakistan court sentences seven over 2023 riots

ISLAMBAD, 2 JAN

An anti-terrorism court in Pakistan on Friday sentenced seven people, including journalists, YouTubers and former military officials, to two life terms each over violence that followed the arrest of former prime minister Imran Khan in May 2023. The case relates to riots on 9 May, when supporters of Khan's PTI party torched army installations and other state property. The prosecution accused the convicts of "digital terrorism", alleging they incited violence through online platforms. As all the accused were abroad, the trials were conducted in absentia under anti-terror laws. The court awarded life imprisonment on two counts waging war against Pakistan and criminal conspiracy along with fines. They have the the right to appeal within seven days. *—PTI*

IN CANADA

Indian-origin cabbie helps deliver baby in car

TORONTO, 2 JAN

An Indian-origin cab driver in Canada helped deliver a baby after a pregnant passenger went into labour during a late-night ride to the hospital in Calgary. The driver, Hardeep Singh Toor, safely transported the mother, father, and newborn to the hospital amid stormy –23°C weather and slippery roads.

Toor responded to a ride request on Saturday night as the couple rushed to reach the hospital. "It was a pregnant lady, and her companion was helping her get in the cab," he told local reporters, adding that he considered calling an ambulance but decided to drive them. "Her body language was telling me she did not have the time," he explained.

Hardeep Singh Toor, a taxi driver in Calgary helped deliver a baby in the backseat of his car during –23°C temperatures *PHOTO: X*

During the 30-minute drive, Toor recalls kicking and shouting from the back seat, but his focus was on getting the family to the Peter Lougheed Centre as quickly and safely as possible.

Just blocks away from the hospital, the baby was born in the back seat with the building already in sight. Toor completed the journey, ensuring the mother and newborn received immediate medical care. "When I got there and saw the staff running to the car, I stepped out—I let them do whatever they needed," he recounted.

- Toor responded to a ride request on Saturday night as the couple rushed to reach the hospital. "It was a pregnant lady, and her companion". However, en route to the hospital, she went into labour

He said the staff informed him that the mother and baby were doing well. "It's my first experience getting two people in and three people out," said Toor, who has driven cabs for four years. He called it a "proud moment." *—PTI*

Russia shares 'proof' of Ukraine strikes on Putin's home

MOSCOW, 2 JAN

Russia has shared "evidence" with the US to prove Ukraine targeted Russian President Vladimir Putin's residence in a drone strike on 29 December 2025. The Defence Ministry released a video of its intelligence chief meeting with a US military attaché in Moscow to present the Novgorod residence attack findings.

Russian Intelligence Chief Igor Kostyukov presented a recovered drone to a US representative, saying its intact navigation system "unequivocally" proves Ukraine was behind the attack.

Ukraine has denied involvement in the drone strike.

UKRAINE DENIES STRIKE ON NY PARTY

After a drone strike on a New Year's Party in Russian-occupied village in Kherson region killed 27 people, Ukraine denied launching the targeting civilian infrastructure.

'RUSSIA PLANS TO BOMB ITS CIVILIANS'

The Foreign Intelligence Service of Ukraine said that Russia is planning large-scale attacks on its own civilians which it will then blame on Kyiv to derail the peace talks. It claimed that Moscow will use fragments of Western made drones to cite Ukraine involvement. *—Agencies*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Rupee settles 22p down at 90.20 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 2 JAN

The Indian rupee slipped below the 90-mark and settled the day lower by 22 paise at 90.20 against the US dollar on Friday. This comes amid disappointing macroeconomic data and strengthening of the American currency in overseas markets.

Forex traders said persistent foreign fund outflows and strong dollar demand from importers further dented investor sentiment.

However, weak crude oil prices and a surge in the domestic equities cushioned the downside, they said, adding that any intervention by the RBI may support the rupee at lower levels.

At the interbank foreign exchange, rupee opened at 89.95 against the dollar, and touched an intra-day low of 90.25 and a high of 89.92. *—PTI*

Gold climbs Rs 1,100 to Rs 1.39L/10g

Gold prices climbed Rs 1,100 to Rs 1,39,440 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid firm trends in international markets, according to the marketmen.

Silver prices also surged by Rs 4,000 to Rs 2,41,400 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes). In the international market, spot gold increased by USD 67.47, or 1.56 per cent, to USD 4,392.94 per ounce. Spot gold is trading with a gain of over 1 per cent at USD 4,390. As the move lacks any clear reason, the rationale could be rate cut expectations by the US Federal Reserve and optimistic outlook for the metal, says Praveen Singh, Head of Commoditie at, Mirae Asset. *—PTI*

AP govt to clear Rs 4,500cr DISCOM power dues

AMARAVATI, 2 JAN

The Andhra Pradesh Electricity Regulatory Commission (APERC) announced that the state government will pay the true-up dues to power distribution companies (DISCOMs). The true-uo dues, or financial gaps, totalling Rs 4,500 crore stem from alleged "mismanagement" from the previous YSRCP government's 2019–2024 term. According to a Thursday press release, the government recognises the impact such a large retrospective burden would have had on end consumers. The Rs 4,500 crore dues will be distributed among the three state-run DISCOM companies: APEPDCL (Eastern) will receive Rs 1,783 crore, APSPDCL (Southern) Rs 1,552 crore, and APCPDCL (Central) Rs 1,163 crore. APERC directed the DISCOMs to claim the amount from the government. *—PTI*

KFC, Pizza Hut operators Sapphire, Devyani merge

Merger makes them Rs 8,000 cr entity with 3,000 stores

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

In a strategic consolidation, India's two Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) operators, Sapphire Foods India and Devyani International Ltd (DIL), have decided to merge to create an Rs 8,000 crore entity with more than 3,000 stores at its disposal.

Sapphire Foods India and Devyani International Ltd (DIL) are the two leading operators of the KFC and Pizza Hut brands in India.

The boards of Devyani International Ltd (DIL) and Sapphire Foods India Ltd (SFIL), the two leading franchise operators of Yum! Brands, at their respective meetings held on Thursday, approved the merger.

As per the scheme of arrangement, SFIL will merge with DIL, an RJ Corp firm promoted by the Jaipuria family. The combined entity will have operations in markets such as India, Nigeria, Nepal, Thailand and Sri Lanka.

Sapphire Foods and DIL are the leading operators of the KFC and Pizza Hut brands in India *PHOTO: AI*

Besides Yum! Brands like KFC, Pizza Hut, and Taco Bell, the combined entity will also hold licenses for other global QSR brands, including Costa Coffee, Tea Live, New York Fries, and Sanook Kitchen, in their respective markets. The merger will also create a single unified Yum! India Franchisee for KFC and Pizza Hut.

According to the scheme of arrangements, 177 equity shares of DIL will be issued for every 100 equity shares of SFIL. "The process of obtaining these approvals is expected to take approximately 12 to 15 months, following which the merger will become effective," according to a joint statement.

The US-based Yum! Brands has granted its approval for the consolidation of DIL and SFIL.

> "The process for obtaining these approvals is expected to take approximately 12 to 15 months, following which the merger will become effective," a DIL, SFIL joint statement said.

"This combination will allow DIL to realise meaningful economies of scale, leverage a unified technology platform, and strengthen our supply-chain capabilities. Together, these advantages will help unlock sustained value creation and long-term growth for our shareholders, customers, employees, and partners," DIL's Non-Executive Chairman Ravi Jaipuria said. *—PTI*

MARKET SNAPSHOT

Sensex jumps 573 points; Nifty hits intra-day high

MUMBAI, 2 JAN

Equity benchmark index Nifty hit its lifetime peak before closing 182 points higher on Friday, and the BSE Sensex jumped 573 points, powered by strong buying in power, banking and metal stocks.

Unabated capital infusion by domestic institutional investors amid a sharp rally in Asian peers also supported the domestic stock market, traders said.

Charting out a firm trend, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 573.41 points or 0.67 per cent to settle at 85,762.01. During the day, it jumped 623.67 points, or 0.73 per cent, to 85,812.27. A total of 2,772 stocks advanced, while 1,449 declined and 150 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Rising for the third-straight session, the 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 182 points, or 0.70 per cent, to 26,328.55. During the day, it surged 193.45 points, or 0.73 per cent, to reach an all-time peak of 26,340.

"After the New Year holiday, the global markets initiated 2026 on a positive note, while strong domestic automobile sales helped Indian equities to touch a fresh all-time high. Investor sentiment remains broadly constructive as attention turns to Q3 earnings, which are expected to guide near-term market direction,"

Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark jumped 720.56 points or 0.84 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 286.25 points or 1.09 per cent.

From the 30-Sensex firms, NTPC, Trent, Bajaj Finance, Power Grid, Maruti, State Bank of India, ICICI Bank and Bharat Electronics were among the biggest gainers.

In contrast, ITC, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Titan Company, Axis Bank and Bharti Airtel were the laggards.

"Select index heavyweights provided additional support, enabling the market to sustain its upward momentum despite the absence of strong global triggers, as several overseas markets remained closed due to holidays. Meanwhile, continued weakness in tobacco-related stocks weighed on the FMCG space following recent tax-related developments," Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. *—PTI*

Tobacco stocks continue to slide; ITC shares drop over 5%

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Shares of cigarette and tobacco giants ITC, Godfrey Phillips, and VST Industries fell further on Friday morning. The slide continues a downward trend triggered by the government's decision to impose additional excise duty on tobacco-related products. The Central Excise Act amendment, imposes an excise duty of Rs 2,050–8,500 per 1,000 cigarette sticks, based on their length, effective from 1 February 2026. This duty will be in addition to the existing 40 per cent GST.

ITC plummeted 5.11 per cent to a 52-week low of Rs 345.35 on the BSE, while Godfrey Phillips and VST Industries dropped 4.58 per cent and 2.56 per cent, respectively. The decline follows a dramatic Thursday session where, Godfrey Phillips India tanked 17.09 per cent to settle at Rs 2,289.65 on the BSE. ITC shares tumbled 9.69 per cent to end at Rs 363.95 and VST Industries dipped 0.60 per cent to Rs 255.15.

The finance ministry has also notified the Health and National Security Cess Act, which will levy a cess on the manufacturing capacity of pan masala-related businesses from 1 February. The total tax incidence on pan masala, including 40 per cent GST, will remain at the current level of 88 per cent. The revised structure replaces the earlier regime of 28 per cent GST along with a compensation cess on tobacco and related products. *—PTI*

DUTY HIKE ON TOBACCO WILL HURT FARMERS, SAYS FAIFA

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

The Federation of All India Farmer Associations (FAIFA) on Friday said the government's move to levy additional excise duty on tobacco products will hurt farmers' income and only exacerbate smuggling. "A sharp increase in taxes has been notified, at the cost of farmers' livelihoods," FAIFA President Murali Babu said. The farmers' body warned that higher retail prices will reduce legal consumption, hurting demand for domestically-grown tobacco and potentially creating a glut in the market.

FAIFA said, India's tax regime discriminates against Flue-Cured Virginia tobacco used in cigarettes, with taxation over 50 times higher than low-budget hand-rolled 'beedi' cigarettes and over 30 times higher than chewin tobacco. The finance ministry notified excise duties of upto Rs 8,500 per 1,000 cigarettes based on length, effective from 1 February, under the Chewing Tobacco, Jarda Scented Tobacco and Gutkha Packing Machines Rules, 2026.The duty increase contradicts the government's assurances of revenue-neutral tax reform. FAIFA has urged a rollback on excise duty for more revenue-neutral duties that support domestic agriculture. *—PTI*

22 proposals accepted under electronics components scheme

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) on Friday said it approved 22 new proposals under the Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS), with a projected investment of Rs 41,863 crore and production of Rs 2,58,152 crore.

The approved proposals include Dixon, Samsung Display Noida Pvt Ltd, Foxconn, and Hindalco Industries, expected to spur 33,791 employment opportunities.

This follows the approval announcmnet of 24 applications for an investment of Rs 12,704 crore.

The approved projects are spread across eight states, including Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, and reflect the government's focus on geographically balanced industrial growth and electronics manufacturing expansion.

Of 11 products, five are bare components such as PCBs, Capacitors, Connectors, and Li-ion Cells; three pertain to sub-assemblies such as Transceivers, Camera and Display modules ; and three are supply chain items such as Aluminium Extrusion, Anode Material, and Laminate. The background note said the approvals aim to strengthen domestic supply chains, reduce import dependence, and support high-value manufacturing capabilities in India. *—PTI*

B'desh, Bhutan, Nepal can directly buy coal from CIL

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Coal India Ltd (CIL) on Friday said buyers from neighbouring nations such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal can now join its online coal auctions directly, skipping the Indian middlemen and added that this would help in utilising the surplus coal resources better and promote transparency.

Earlier, access to Coal India Ltd's (CIL) dry fuel by consumers across the borders was only through domestic coal traders who were allowed to buy and sell without any end-use restrictions.

"In a first, effective 1 January, 2026, CIL has permitted coal consumers located in the neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, who wish to import coal from India, to directly participate in the Single Window Mode Agnostic (SWMA) auctions conducted by the company," CIL said in a statement.

All operational and procedural modalities have been incorporated in the updated scheme, with key provisions for foreign buyers including one-time registration, digital bidding, advanced electronic payments and exports through notified logistics channels.

The payment process will be transparent as per Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) rules, with Nepal buyers allowed to pay in INR or US dollars, while those from the other two countries must pay in US dollars, valued in INR, CIL has said. *—PTI*

India-UK trade pact to come into force by June 2026: UK

KOLKATA, 2 JAN

The India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) is expected to be enacted by June 2026, marking a new era in the nations' partnership.

British Deputy High Commissioner Andrew Fleming described the pact as the most "comprehensive and ambitious" deal negotiated by either government. He noted that the expansive agreement, will offer opportunities for businesses of all sizes, particularly for exporters in West Bengal and 12 states across East and Northeast India. Fleming urged regional businesses to prepare to harness the upcoming benefits.

It is India's most ambitious trade agreement till date, covering 26 sectors from tariffs to technology. The pact aims to double bilateral trade to USD 112 billion.

Under the CETA, Indian exporters will gain duty-free access to 99 per cent of their products in the UK market. This includes labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, leather, toys, gems and jewellery, as well as high-growth sectors like engineering, chemical, and auto component goods.

The agreement is also expected to benefit UK goods, like whisky, through tariff rationalisation. *—PTI*

India's manufacturing at 2-yr low: PMI

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

India's manufacturing sector saw its weakest growth in two years this December, on account of softer expansions in new orders. Prompting firms to limit input purchases and job creation, a monthly survey found.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), which indicates sector performance, fell from 56.6 in November to 55 in December. A score above 50 means expansion, while below 50 denotes contraction.

2025 was characterised by loss of momentum across several measures tracked by the HSBC India PMI survey.

Production growth slowed to a 38-month low amid the weakest upturn in new orders in the last two years. New export orders grew at their slowest pace in 14 months. "We have seen steady softer growth in new export orders. In fact, the share of companies signalling higher international sales in December was about half of the average for 2025. The survey's evidence also pointed to a narrower range of export destinations, with goods mainly heading to Asia, Europe and the Middle East," said Pollyanna De Lima, Economics Associate Director at S&P.

A softer increase in new business intakes prompted companies to limit the inputs purchased. "The pace of job creation was the lowest in the current period of growth that began in March 2024," the survey said.

On the price front, the survey said input costs rose at a historically negligible pace. Indian goods producers foresee an increase in output during 2026, but the overall sentiment level has faded to its lowest in close to three-and-a-half years. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

GIG WORKERS' STRIKE

Blinkit, Zomato founder defends 10-min deliveries

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Eternal Founder Deepinder Goyal said that "less regulation" for India's gig economy would eventually help bring more people into the workforce. The remarks come amid gig workers' unions staging protests, demanding better payouts and improved working conditions.

Eternal owns both Zomato and Blinkit.

The Gig & Platform Services Workers' Union (GIPSWU) last month wrote to Union Minister for Labour and Employment Mansukh Mandaviya raising several issues, most notable is their demand to "urgently discontinue 10-20 minute service delivery mandates to prioritise worker safety".

In November, the government notified all four labour codes, ushering in major reforms, including social security for gig workers.

Goyal took to X to chime in on the debate surrounding the country's gig workforce, a day after their unions went on strike on New Year's Eve, with the agitation having a negligible impact on operations of food delivery and quick commerce firms. "I repeat, gig work is one of the largest organised job creation engines in India. And we provide insurance, fair, timely and predictable wages."

In a separate post, the Eternal Founder explained how companies fulfil the 10-minute delivery promise. "Our 10-minute delivery promise is enabled by the density of stores around your homes. It's not enabled by asking delivery partners to drive fast. Delivery partners don't even have a timer on their app to indicate what was the original time promised to the customer.

"After you place your order on Blinkit, it is picked and packed within 2.5 minutes. And then the rider drives an average of under 2 km in about 8 minutes. That's an average of 15kmph," Goyal said.

According to estimates, there are over 12.7 million gig workers in India, with government think tank NITI Aayog saying the gig workforce is expected to rise to 23.5 million by 2029-30. *—PTI*

Sai fractures rib, could be out for 6 weeks

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Young India batter Sai Sudharsan could be sidelined for more than a month after sustaining a rib fracture during a recent Vijay Hazare Trophy game against Madhya Pradesh, a BCCI source said on Friday. Sudharsan, who isn't a part of India's white ball set-up, fractured the "anterior cortex of seventh right rib" while completing a diving run in Tamil Nadu's VHT game against Madhya Pradesh in Ahmedabad. The 24-year-old is unlikely to be fit for Tamil Nadu's remaining Ranji Trophy games but a more realistic possibility remains that he will be available for Gujarat Titans in the IPL. According to sources, Sudharsan reported to the Centre Of Excellence in Bengaluru on December 29 and a scan report mentioned "a slender, undisplaced fracture of the anterior cortex of the right seventh rib."—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Ameerah wins women's 10m air rifle title

BHOPAL, 2 JAN

Haryana's Ameerah Arshad delivered a composed performance under pressure to clinch the 10m Air Rifle women's title at the 68th National Shooting Championship (Rifle) here on Friday. She edged past Railways' Rajshree Anilkumar Sancheti by a razor-thin margin of 0.1 point. In other events, Zuhair Khan of Uttar Pradesh won the men's trap gold with 43 hits. Ameerah finished the women's final with a score of 251.9, narrowly ahead of Sancheti, who settled for silver on 251.8, while Chhattisgarh's Pranju Shree Somani secured the bronze medal with 230.5. At the shotgun range in New Delhi, junior men's trap bronze-medallist Zuhair finished on top in the senior men's trap final with 43 hits.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Completely humiliated: Jason Gillespie

KARACHI, 2 JAN

The sacking of Tim Nielsen as high-performance red-ball coach was among several issues with the PCB, which left him "completely humiliated", says former Australia great Jason Gillespie, looking back at his short nine-month stint as Pakistan head coach. In April 2024, the Pakistan Cricket Board appointed Gillespie as the head coach in red-ball cricket, and former South African batter Gary Kirsten was roped in for a similar role in white-ball formats.—*PTI*

Tsitsipas, Sakkari give Greece lead over Japan

SYDNEY, 2 JAN

Stefanos Tsitsipas found his winning touch on his return to action from injury as he led Greece to an unassailable 2-0 lead over Japan on Friday in group play at the ATP-WTA United Cup. The former world number three dispatched Shintaro Mochizuki 6-3, 6-4 as he played his first match in almost four months after a recurring back injury forced him to take a break from the sport. "I've had a lot of uncertainty, I didn't know if I could compete," Tsitsipas said. "But to play at this level is something I'm very grateful for. I'm healthy, and that's the most important thing in the world. I hope this tournament can give me some confidence before the Australian Open (18 January to 1 February)—*PTI*

India may tour B'desh for a 3-match ODI and T20I series

It is not clear if BCCI will agree to travel to Bangladesh

DHAKA, 2 JAN

The Bangladesh Cricket Board on Friday announced it will host India for a three-match ODI as well as T20I series to be played in September this year.

However, **it is not clear if BCCI will agree to travel to Bangladesh** in prevailing conditions with no stable government in place.

According to a media release by the BCB, the three ODIs will be played on September 1, 3, and 6, while the T20Is will be played on September 9, 1,2 and 13.

The Indian team will reach Bangladesh on 28 August for their limited-overs affair.

In July last year, India's tour of Bangladesh was called off indefinitely, and the six-match white-ball tour was deferred for more than one year.

"The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) have mutually agreed to defer the white-ball series, three ODIs and three Twenty20 Internationals, between Bangladesh and India in August 2025 to September 2026," the BCCI had informed in a statement last July.

"This decision has been reached following discussions between the two Boards, taking into account the international cricketing commitments and scheduling convenience of both teams."

"This series promises to be one of the most exciting and most anticipated events in our home calendar," BCB's chief executive, Nizam Uddin Chowdhury said. India has set the benchmark in international cricket across all formats, and the cricket-loving millions in both countries are sure to enjoy this contest. Bangladesh and India have played some very competitive matches in recent years, and I am confident that this will be another hard-fought and entertaining series."India are scheduled to arrive in Dhaka on 13 August.

Nizam Uddin Chowdhury *PHOTO: PTI*

They will play the first two ODIs on 17 and 20 August, before heading to Chattogram to play the third ODI and first T20I on 23 and 26 August.They will return to Dhaka to play the last two T20Is on 29 and 31 August. August, however, isn't the cricket season in Bangladesh. They have played during this time of the year only a couple of times in the past - the first Test against Australia in 2017 and the five T20Is against the same opposition in 2021. India, however, is no stranger to playing during the off-season in Bangladesh. In 2014, they played a three-match ODI series in June. —*PTI*

No general public allowed for Gill's Hazare Trophy game

Just like Virat Kohli played his two Vijay Hazare Trophy games behind closed doors at the Centre of Excellence (CoE), no general public will be allowed during Indian ODI skipper Shubman Gill's match for Punjab against Sikkim at the Jaipuria College ground here on Saturday. As per the BCCI diktat, the Indian captain and pace spearhead Arshdeep Singh will be playing Punjab's next couple of Vijay Hazare Trophy games against Sikkim and Goa on 3 and 6 January

DUTCHMAN IS BACK

Marijne returns as women's hockey head coach

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Dutchman Sjoerd Marijne was on Friday reappointed as the chief coach of the Indian women's hockey team, marking his return to the set-up after guiding the side to a historic fourth-place finish at the Tokyo Olympic Games.

The 51-year-old, who was associated with the Indian women's team from 2017 to 2021, will be supported by Matias Vila as analytical coach. Vila, a former Argentine midfielder, made his international debut in 1997 and represented his country at the 2000 Sydney Olympics and the 2004 Athens Olympics. He has been involved in coaching for over two decades.

Also returning to the Indian hockey set-up is Wayne Lombard, who will serve as scientific advisor and head of athletic performance. He will be supported by Rodet Yila and Ciara Yila, both in the role of scientific advisor.

"It's great to be back. After 4.5 years, I return with fresh energy and a clear vision to support the team's growth and help the players achieve their full potential on the world stage," said Marijne, under whose tenure India broke into the top 10 of the world rankings, in a release. Marijne's first big challenge as chief coach will be the Women's World Cup Qualifiers in Hyderabad, Telangana, from 8 to 14 March. Marijne will arrive in India on 14 January, while the National Coaching Camp begins on January 19 in SAI, Bengaluru. "We welcome Sjoerd Marijne and the entire support staff to the Indian Hockey family," Hockey India President Dr Dilip Tirkey said.

"We extend our gratitude to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) and Sports Authority of India (SAI) for expediting the appointment to ensure the team's preparations for the upcoming World Cup Qualifiers are not hampered."

—*PTI*

Dutchman Sjoerd Marijne *PHOTO: PTI*

INDIA'S SQUAD VS NZ ODIS: GILL SET TO RETURN AS CAPTAIN, PANT MAY MAKE WAY FOR KISHAN

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Shubman Gill is set to return as India's men's ODI captain, while vice-captain Shreyas Iyer is likely to remain sidelined when the national senior selection committee finalises the squad for the three-match series against New Zealand. The selection panel is scheduled to meet online on Saturday.

Gill, who missed the ODI series against South Africa in November after suffering a neck spasm during the opening Test, will also attend the first official selection committee meeting of the calendar year.

Gill's return is expected to result in Dhruv Jurel who was drafted in as a reserve batter for the South Africa series making way for the opener.

Shreyas, out of action since hurting his abdominal muscles in Australia in October, had been targeting a comeback for the New Zealand ODIs, but delays in his rehabilitation have meant that the middle-order batter is yet to receive medical clearance from the Centre of Excellence.

The only other possible change could be the return of Ishan Kishan in place of Rishabh Pant as the reserve wicketkeeper-batter.

It is understood that the selection committee feels that, apart from having proven his credentials in the 50-over format during the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy, Kishan should also be given sufficient time to re-settle into the Indian dressing room following a two-year absence. —*PTI*

PAKISTAN-BORN

Usman Khawaja confirms retirement in riveting speech

SYDNEY, 2 JAN

Usman Khawaja announced his retirement from international cricket on Friday, with the fifth Ashes Test, starting Sunday, in Sydney set to be his farewell match.

With the best score of 232 Usman Khawaja, in a riveting speech, said I am a coloured boy from Pakistan

Usman Khawaja posted his highest Test score against Sri Lanka in Galle last year. Opening the batting, Khawaja played a near-perfect knock, surviving 352 deliveries for his 232 runs to set up a daunting score of 654/6 dec. in the first innings. Australia won the match by an innings and 242 runs, and Khawaja was adjudged Player of the Match.

"I'm a proud Muslim, coloured boy from Pakistan who was told that he would never play for the Australian cricket team. Look at me now, and you can do the same," he added. Khawaja immigrated to Australia from Islamabad as a child, battling the odds to become the country's first Pakistan-born and first Muslim national player.

"Usman has made a huge contribution to Australian cricket both through his outstanding achievements as one of our most stylish and resilient batters since his Test debut 15 years ago —*PTI*

RETIREMENT FROM INT'L CRICKET

Usman Khawaja, with his final match being the fifth Ashes Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground. Below are his final career statistics

Format	Matches	Runs	Batting Average	Centuries/Fifties
Tests	87	6,206	43.39	16/28
ODIs	40	1,554	42.00	2/12
T20Is	9	241	26.77	0/2
FC	225	15,477	43.84	43/74

ANJUM DROPPED AS PAK HOCKEY TEAM MANAGER

LAHORE, 2 JAN

The Pakistan Hockey Federation will not send former Olympian Anjum Saeed as manager with the national team for the second phase of the FIH Pro League, following an incident of indiscipline in Brazil last month.

The second phase of the FIH Pro League is scheduled to be held in Hobart, Australia, next month, and a reliable PHF source said that Anjum will not even attend the national training camp for the event.

"It has been decided not to send Anjum with the team to Australia because of his undisciplined behavior while returning home from Argentina last month with the national team," the source said. "Head coach Tahir Zaman will also act as manager in Australia."

Anjum, who was the team manager, was detained by Brazilian authorities in Rio de Janeiro during the return journey after the team's flight stopped there for refuelling. He was allegedly caught smoking on the aircraft, which led to an argument with airline staff, following which he was detained for a day and not allowed to return with the squad. Anjum and a player who stayed back with him eventually returned to Pakistan on a later flight, two days after the team reached home. Though Anjum denied that he was smoking, the source said the PHF had completed its inquiry and found him guilty of indiscipline—*PTI*

Neeraj, Sachin in AIU's Registered Testing Pool

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Javelin throwers Neeraj Chopra and Sachin Yadav are the only Indian athletes to figure in the Registered Testing Pool (RTP) of World Athletics' anti-doping watchdog Athletes Integrity Unit's (AIU) for the first quarter of this year.

While two-time Olympic medal-winning Chopra has been a regular on this list, Yadav is a new entrant after his fourth-place finish in the World Championships last year. The Asian Championships silver-medallist outperformed Chopra at the world event, where the latter finished eighth due to nagging fitness issues that hampered his performance.

Yadav covered a personal best of 86.27m to not just end up higher than Chopra, but also reigning Olympic champion Arshad Nadeem of Pakistan, who also endured a bad day, ending 10th overall.

The 26-year-old from Uttar Pradesh, who is over six feet tall, is being widely seen as the next big thing inthe Indian javelin throw landscape, dominated completely by Chopra for over half a decade now. The RTP is the highest-tier pool of international or national-level athletes who undergo no-advance notice testing. —*PTI*

South Africa squad for T20 WC 2026 announced

CAPE TOWN, 2 JAN

Aiden Markram will lead the 15-member South Africa squad in the T20 World Cup 2026 in India and Sri Lanka, the national cricket board announced on Friday.

The right-handed batter continues his tenure as T20 International (T20I) captain, leading a squad that strikes a deliberate balance between veteran stability and explosive young talent.

In a massive boost for the Proteas' bowling attack, spearhead Kagiso Rabada has been cleared for a return to action. Rabada missed the recent white-ball tour against India due to a rib injury, but his presence in the squad provides the necessary firepower and experience to lead the pace battery.

Explosive top-order wicketkeeper-batter Ryan Rickelton has been left out of the 15-member squad, while Jason Smith gets a call-up.—*PTI*

Markram *PHOTO: PTI*

VENUS WILLIAMS GETS AUSTRALIAN OPEN WILDCARD

MELBOURNE, 2 JAN

Seven-time Grand Slam singles champion Venus Williams has received a wild-card entry for the Australian Open beginning 18 Jan in Melbourne.

The tournament said Friday that the 45-year-old Williams would make a return to Melbourne Park 28 years after her first appearance. In 1998, she defeated her younger sister Serena in the second round before losing in the quarterfinals to fellow American Lindsay Davenport.

Venus had announced in November that she would play in Auckland, New Zealand, where she also received a wild card, two weeks before the Australian Open. The Australian Open said Williams was also entered to play a tournament in Hobart, Australia, a week later, and just before play begins at Melbourne Park.

She last appeared in Melbourne in 2021 and has finished runner-up in the women's singles twice, losing to Serena in the finals in 2003 and 2017.

"I'm excited to be back in Australia and looking forward to competing during the Australian summer," Williams said. —*PTI*

PREMIER LEAGUE

Man City and Liverpool frustrated in 0-0 draws

LONDON, 2 JAN

Erling Haaland and Manchester City were frustrated in a 0-0 draw at Sunderland, leaving Arsenal with a four-point lead at the halfway stage of the Premier League season on Friday.

Liverpool couldn't manage a goal against a promoted team, either, laboring to a 0-0 draw against Leeds at Anfield.

The stalemates highlighted the strength in depth in England's lucrative top flight. They also may have shown why Arsenal has been able to forge ahead after 19 of 38 games in its bid for a first league title since 2004, with City and Liverpool — the dominant forces in English soccer over the last decade — having lost their old fluency going forward.

Erling Haaland of Manchester City takes a shot against Sunderland in a Premier League match *PHOTO: X/@MANCITY*

There were draws all round on a low-scoring night, with Tottenham held 0-0 at Brentford and Fulham scoring in the 80th minute to finish 1-1 at Crystal Palace.

City's run overCity was on an eight-match winning run in all competitions, but stumbled against an opponent that has drawn against Arsenal and beaten Newcastle at its Stadium of Light home over the last two months. Haaland had opportunitieson either side of half-time against stubborn Sunderland but couldn't add to his league-high 19 goals for the campaign.

Indeed, it was substitute defender Josko Gvardiol who came closest for City, flicking a shot against the post and having a header saved from point-blank range. —*PTI*